

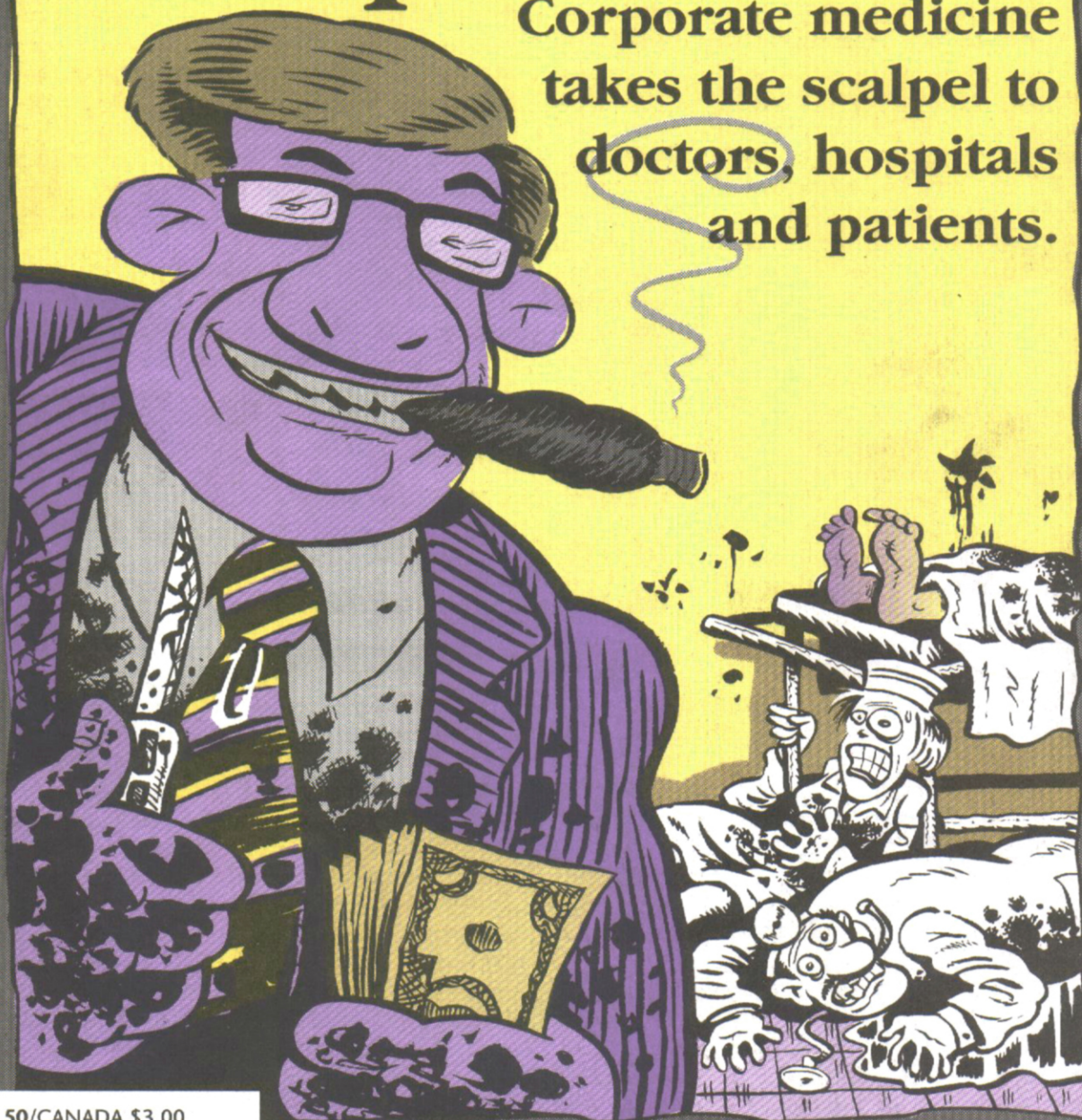
WILLIE BROWN'S BAIT AND SWITCH

March 3-16, 1997

In THESE TIMES

Invasive procedures

Corporate medicine
takes the scalpel to
doctors, hospitals
and patients.



\$2.50/CANADA \$3.00



Sean Cahill on America's greediest hospital chain.
Annette Fuentes on doctors unions.

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EDITORIAL

TIME FOR REAL CAMPAIGN-FINANCE REFORM

If buying politicians' loyalty through campaign contributions is a form of corruption, then the 1996 federal elections were the most corrupt in our history. Overall, the November presidential and congressional elections cost some \$2.7 billion. This frenzy of fundraising was needed to pay for the television ads, mostly consisting of sound bites, that substituted for an honest discussion of the issues facing the American people.

The 1996 campaign met with almost universal disgust. According to a *USA Today/CNN* poll, 83 percent of Americans want Congress to reform campaign-finance laws. Sensing this, candidates from both parties promised campaign-finance reform if elected. But now, in the new governing season, the issue is all but dead. The campaign-reform measure that President Clinton has endorsed—the McCain-Feingold bill—has garnered only one additional sponsor, Republican Sen. Fred Thompson of Tennessee. Clinton himself has let the issue slide off his list of legislative priorities.

Instead of addressing the underlying problem, Republicans are trying to provoke as much of an uproar as they can over the paltry million or two that Clinton operatives solicited from Asian businessmen. But sleazy as that operation was, it pales in significance when compared to the \$23 million that a group of 59 government contractors gave to candidates of both parties, partly through political action committees and partly through the parties as "soft money"—dollars supposedly used for political education. For decades, it has been illegal for government contractors to contribute directly to candidates. But this law, enacted in 1974 as part of the post-Watergate reforms, is no real barrier to such spending, since it allows giving through PACs and as soft money.

Last year, Sen. John Warner of Virginia, the second-ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, received \$231,541 in PAC money from military contractors, while Republican Rep. Bob Livingston of Louisiana, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, received \$148,450. For the relative handful of dollars paid to key members of Congress, the top 100 government contractors got a princely return: a \$99.8 billion share (55 percent) of government contracts in 1995. This,

says former Wisconsin Sen. William Proxmire, "is very transparent bribery." Yet it's par for the course under our current system, driven both by the loopholes in the law and by the nature of television campaigning, which is by far the largest single expense facing candidates today.

Principled people in both major parties are concerned about how this system affects the health of our democracy. Republican Rep. Bill Thomas of California, sponsor of a campaign-finance reform bill in the House, explains: "Current laws diminish

the role of political parties. In effect, political parties now function like 'super PACs.' " As Charles Lewis, author of *The Buying of the President*, observes, since "both parties get the same money from the same sources ... both parties now look the same." Not surprisingly, therefore, the shrinking role of parties has been accompanied by a deep cynicism about politicians and an overwhelming estrangement from politics, especially among citizens with little or no money to contribute.

Campaign-finance reform is a complex issue. The desire to limit the influence of money in our social system often conflicts with the desire to avoid government limitations on political action. That's one reason for the diversity of proposals and plans that would-be reformers have put forward,

most of which revolve around limitations on soft money and PACs. Yet there is one reform—not mentioned in any of the current plans—that would drastically reduce the amount of money needed for presidential and congressional campaigns, while greatly increasing access to the process

Let's require broadcasters to give blocks of free time to all qualified candidates.

by grass-roots movements and groups. All broadcasters should be required, as a condition of their licenses, to provide blocks of time to all candidates who can demonstrate that they have a minimum base of support.

This fundamental change in the rules governing exposure of candidates on television makes sense because the airwaves belong to the public. All broadcasting companies are now licensed by the government, and the terms under which they operate are set by Congress. So why not require that broadcasters, during a defined electoral season, set aside regular half-hour segments in which candidates, or members of their organizations, discuss issues in depth? This would greatly reduce the cost of campaigning, and it would cost the public nothing. It would open the political process to many groups now excluded. And it would vastly improve the level of political discourse by allowing serious discussion of the issues in place of the sound-bite commercials that now pollute the airwaves during political campaigns. ◀

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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InTHESE TIMES

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Columbia/HCA, the Wal-Mart of hospital chains, is gobbling up beleaguered nonprofits.

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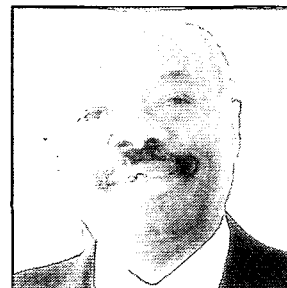
Squeezed by HMOs, doctors are forming their own unions.

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San Francisco mayor Willie Brown
is up to his old tricks.

RANDY SHAW

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LETTERS

Executive outcomes

Your January 20 editorial, "The line-item veto degrades democracy," correctly points out that power is tending to shift from Congress to the executive branch. In the 19th century, except in wartime, the leaders of the nation were from the Congress, not the White House. Our coins were adorned with Indian heads, buffalo and Liberty, not presidents. The best chronicle of this period is perhaps Woodrow Wilson's *Congressional Government*, published in 1885.

However, you may have confused the rise of the former Interstate Commerce Commission with the more recent growth of executive agencies. The ICC—created in 1887, not 1877, as stated in the editorial—was an independent agency of the Congress, whereas the more recent Federal Rail-

road Administration is an executive-branch agency. There are more important differences. One of these is tenure. The former ICC members served six-year terms, but the FRA head serves at the pleasure of the president. To be sure, as long as industry is privately owned, a regulated industry will have a big say in how its overseeing agency operates, whether congressional or executive. But it is easier to secure effective congressional oversight over a congressional agency than over an executive agency.

Gordon P. MacDougall
Washington, D.C.

Insupportable

Michael Ferber's February 3 letter raises the legitimate question of whether continued population and economic growth is a desirable thing, but Ferber seems to end by accepting

the notion that without continued population growth, Social Security would be unsustainable. This relates to the often-noted fact that the ratio of active workers to retirees is declining and will continue to decline as baby boomers age. This observation, while accurate, is too narrow to capture the important reality. The right question to ask is: "How many productive workers can support how many non-productive people, and at what level?"

Through all of history, a minority of productive workers has supported a majority of nonproducers. The non-producers include children, old people, the disabled and the wealthy leisure class. From a demographic perspective, children have always made up the largest number of nonproducers. If we halted or reversed population growth, there would be far fewer children to support, and a given number of productive workers would be able to support far more retirees.

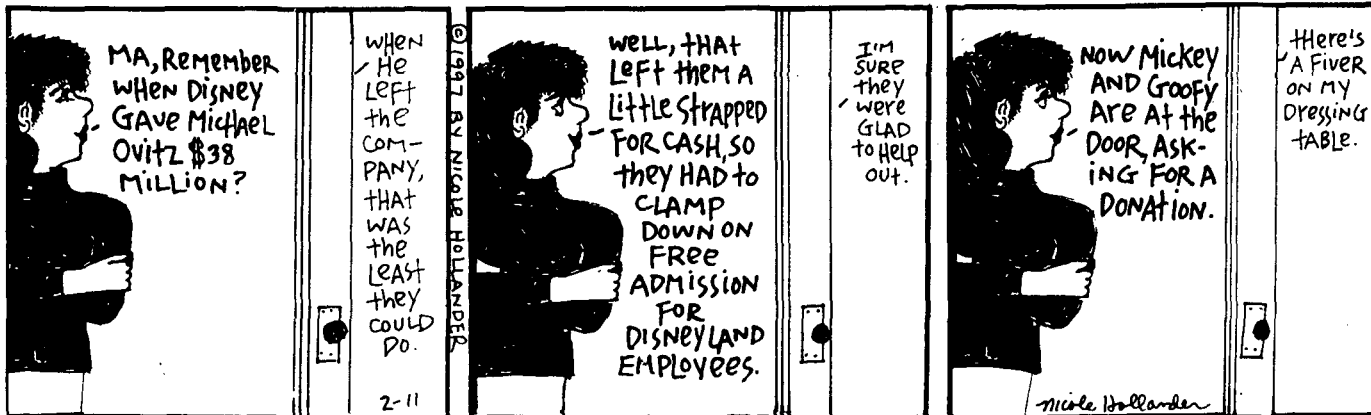
However, from a social-justice perspective, the leisure class consumes the bulk of the surplus produced by active workers. Reducing their level of support to this group would allow active workers to support both themselves and their retired parents quite comfortably.

We can worry about whether the number of productive workers suffices to support the rest of the population just as soon as everyone who wants a job has one. Until then, the issue is wealth distribution, not production.

Tim Joseph
Ithaca, N.Y.

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



Broken-down donkey

I was astonished to find an article in *In These Times* heralding the resurrection of the Democratic Party's Progressive Caucus ("Whose party is it?" February 3), led by socialists I admire such as Noam Chomsky, Barbara Ehrenreich and our token socialist in Congress, Rep. Bernie Sanders.

The last few years have made it abundantly clear that there is no difference between the two major American parties and that the interests of the people reside elsewhere. Wanting to take the leadership of the Democratic Party from Clinton and his cronies is like trying to take from them a broken-down donkey whose head and behind are dislocated and beyond repair. For all intents and purposes, neither major party is alive and well.

Bill Goold, Sanders' legislative director, and Karen Dolan, of the Institute for Policy Studies, could better spend their time running workshops as part of an overall plan to create a viable alternative to the corporation-dominated Democratic Party. This party is, after all, not a party at all, but a conglomerate of heavies that connives to win elections and otherwise has no noticeable existence or popular support. Let Goold and Dolan try allying themselves with the new Labor Party, which shows all the signs of having tremendous potential as a people's party. I say to them, don't be afraid to stand strongly for what you believe, and don't think that, to do so, you must attach yourselves to some bedraggled symbol that has long forsaken the interests of the common people.

Ruth Greenberg-Edelstein
Syracuse, N.Y.

Start young

Kim Phillips' article "The parent trap" (February 17) was welcome. As an early childhood education teacher (who also lives in poverty), I was pleased to read that parents said that their children "learn" at Chicago's



North Side Child Development Center. But the societal myth that childcare is "babysitting" is still prevalent.

The United States is the only industrialized nation without a national, affordable and accessible childcare system. Despite experience, training, education and degrees, childcare teachers are among the lowest-paid workers (\$6.40 national average hourly wage) and have exceptionally high turnover.

Childcare in America is barely adequate and too expensive. The rich will always have access to childcare. What about the rest of us? And what about the children? I believe that we should judge a society by how it treats its youngest citizens.

The years from birth to the age of 5 are the most important developmental years of a child's life. If young children are denied access to a head start and do not receive basic emotional, cognitive and physical education, they will not make good transitions into elementary school—and society will be plagued by problems in the long run. If we had built more child-development centers years ago, we would not be building so many prisons today.

Lauren M. Tozzi
Seattle

Long overdue

Your editorial "A homily for the left" (December 23) was a long-overdue recognition of organized religion's posi-

tion on human and social capital. In poor and working-class neighborhoods, the only remaining mediating institutions tend to be local congregations.

Roman Catholics strongly support workers' rights to organize and the need for protection from corporate profiteers. In this, they have been a beacon of enlightenment for everybody. Our marketized culture, with its downsizing, union-busting, maximized-profits, minimized-risk philosophy, has replaced the human person with economic man. Organized civil society is the only force that can keep the market in its place. The Catholic bishops have got it right: Human capital trumps all other kinds of capital.

Edward T. Chambers
Executive Director
Industrial Areas Foundation
Chicago

Corrections

Joel Bleifuss' "Warfare or welfare" (December 9) mistakenly identified Women's Action for New Directions as a coalition representing 6 million women nationwide. WAND is a national membership organization that participates in the Council of Presidents, a coalition of 120 national women's organizations that together represent 6 million women nationwide.

In our February 17 issue, we omitted Randy Shaw's byline from the story "Wilson's war on the poor."

InSHORT

It is no coincidence that the bill's language applies to election-related advertising and information efforts like the AFL-CIO's 1996 campaign, says Candice Johnson, a spokesperson for the Communications Workers of America. Johnson points out that under current law, workers in union shops already have the right to withhold their dues money from political activities: They can opt out of the union and pay only for collective-bargaining services. This right was established by *Beck vs. Communications Workers of America*, a case in which CWA member Harry E. Beck and 20 co-workers sued the union for using dues to support Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 presidential election. After a 12-year legal battle as the case wound its way through the federal court system, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a majority opinion in 1988 finding that any fees charged to nonmembers "beyond those necessary to finance collective-bargaining activities violated the judicially created duty of fair representation."

Beck was represented in his case by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, a non-profit organization that attempts to drum up lawsuits against unions over "forced" unionism and the use of members' dues money for politics. It is part of a network of well-heeled anti-union organizations based in Springfield, Va., that includes full-time lobbying groups, such as the National Right to Work Committee and the Concerned

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Anti-labor backlash heats up

Although they did their best last year to dismiss the AFL-CIO's \$35 million campaign to unseat anti-labor representatives, congressional Republicans are determined to avoid facing such a threat again. Sens. Don Nickles of Oklahoma and Judd Gregg of New Hampshire have sponsored a bill that would outlaw the use of union dues money for political activities without prior authorization from individual members. The so-called Paycheck Protection Act, one of the Senate GOP's top 10 legislative priorities for 1997, broadly defines political activities as "communications or other activities which involve carrying on propaganda, attempting to influence legislation, or participating or intervening in any political campaign or political party."

Educators Against Forced Unionism, and the National Institute for Labor Relations Research, which provides research support for other groups. With an annual budget of roughly \$4 million, including generous donations from right-wing funders like the John M. Olin Foundation, the Legal Defense Foundation advertises an 800 number that union members can call to receive free legal help in suing their union, including a postage-paid application and a sample letter to union officials resigning union membership. The foundation currently boasts of using the *Beck* decision to litigate 400 cases in which workers are suing unions for spending dues money for political purposes. Twenty-five percent of these cases are against the National Education

Association, the largest teachers union in the country.

The CWA's Johnson warns that the Paycheck Protection Act would impose even tighter constraints on union political activity than the *Beck* decision. Nickles, assistant Senate majority leader and a member of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, explains that his bill is "proactive," whereas the *Beck* decision is merely "reactive." The *Beck* ruling is limited, Nickles contends, because it provides workers the right to get their money back only after the dues money has been collected, while the Paycheck Protection Act mandates that money cannot be "involuntarily" collected for politics at any time.

Gayle Osterberg, a spokesperson for Nickles, denies that the proposed legislation is a partisan attempt at payback for labor's role in the last election. Nickles was inspired to draft the bill, Osterberg says, after attending a town meeting last year in Owasso, Okla., during which a union member spoke out against the use of his dues money in a local political campaign.

A more likely explanation for the bill, however, is that Nickles, Gregg and other Republican leaders have begun to fear the political impact of a resurgent labor movement. The question is: Do the Democrats, the chief beneficiaries of the AFL-CIO's efforts last year, appreciate labor's potential as a political force? After all, even though organized labor didn't succeed in wresting control of Congress from the Republicans, unions can take credit for a number of Democratic victories. How Clinton and congressional Democrats respond to the Paycheck Protection Act and other GOP attacks on labor will ultimately determine whether the AFL-CIO spent its money wisely.

—Jim Young

Policy for sale

In late January, the Center for Public Integrity, a Washington, D.C.-based nonpartisan group that investigates ethics-related issues, released a report that sheds light on the U.S. government's longstanding obsession with Cuba. "Squeeze Play: The United States, Cuba and the Helms-Burton Act" provides evidence to support what many have presumed for years: The disproportionate influence of conservative Cuban-Americans distorts U.S. policy toward Cuba.

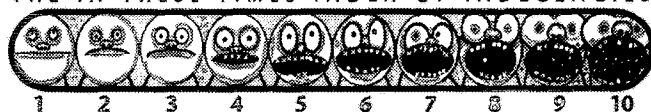
"Squeeze Play" reveals that since 1979, "individuals and organizations with an identifiable interest or stake in the future of Cuba" have poured more than \$4.4 million into the U.S. political system. Of this amount, \$3.2 million came from trustees and directors of the right-wing Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), which, since its founding in 1981, has become the most potent voice on the U.S. government's Cuba policy.

According to the report, CANF and its director, Jorge

Continued on page 9

APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

Friendly persuasion 8.8

Okay, you can torture just once—but don't make a habit of it! A recently declassified CIA manual, titled "Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual—1983," taught aspiring spooks in Central America "coercive" interrogation techniques and the "proper way to use them." The manual emphasized the three Ds of torture: debility, dependency and dread. But it gently admonished those who came to rely too heavily on physical abuse as a "quick and easy way out." In 1985, the CIA revised the manual, warning against the use of torture—which it declared not only wrong on human rights grounds but also just plain inefficient. "Use of force is a poor technique, yields unreliable results, may damage subsequent collection efforts, and can induce the source to say what he thinks the interrogator wants to hear," the manual explained. After releasing the materials, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by the *Baltimore Sun*, CIA officials insisted that torture was "neither authorized nor condoned" by the agency today—which suggests that even without being tortured, they know a little something about the technique of telling people what they want to hear.

A hole of one's own 9.8

A Spanish woman imprisoned in a fetid hole under her family's cottage for four decades was there "voluntarily." At least that's what her parents say. A recent story in *The Times* of London detailed the case of Lola Viña Coteló, who was recently discovered in her hole—and coaxed out of it—by visiting charity workers after they heard "very loud grunting and frenzied scraping noises" coming from the back of her parents' house. The 44-year-old woman, who has gone blind and can't move her hands or legs, climbed into the hole when she was four, her parents say, and simply refused to come out. "We tried often to get her out of there, but she wouldn't listen," her mother told the press. "So we just let her be."

One's a crowd 6.6

A Wisconsin woman suing her former doctor for malpractice claims that he brainwashed her into believing she had more than 100 personalities—allowing him to charge her insurance company for group therapy. According to *The Associated Press*, Nadean Cool says psychiatrist Kenneth Olsen convinced her that her multiple personalities included angels, a duck and even Satan. Blue Cross paid out more than \$200,000 for the "group-therapy" treatment, which, Cool says, included an exorcism.

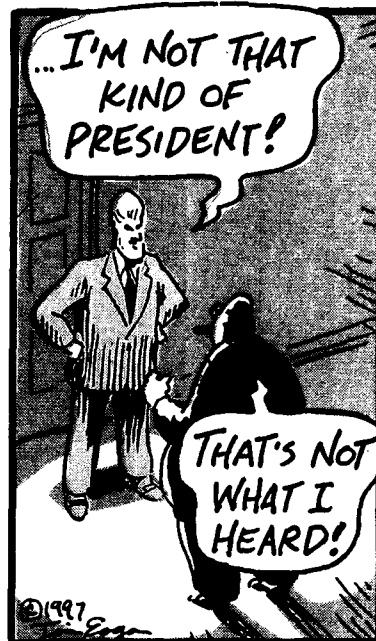


THE BIG PICTURE

BY TIM EAGAN



AW, C'MON...
HOW ABOUT A
LITTLE ACCESS?



Continued from page 7

Mas Canosa, have created a lobbying force that is "dollar for dollar, the most effective in Washington." While CANF has not necessarily done anything illegal, according to the report, it has exerted a "potent, sometimes fearsome" influence. In particular, CANF and its unaffiliated ally, the Free Cuba PAC, have accomplished three things.

First, they successfully squelched efforts to shut down Radio and TV Martí, the \$280 million taxpayer-financed program that broadcasts anti-Castro propaganda to Cuba. The station's multimillion-dollar move to Miami this year was approved without congressional hearings despite serious questions about bias and effectiveness.

Second, CANF played a major role in the passage of the 1992 Cuba Democracy Act, which, among other things, outlawed trade with Cuba by subsidiaries of U.S. companies. The bill's sponsor, Democrat Robert Torricelli of New Jersey, had as recently as 1989 co-sponsored legislation that would have partially lifted the embargo. Apparently, "Squeeze Play" notes, Rep. Torricelli underwent a change of heart on the issue in 1991, when he became chairman of the subcommittee that oversees Cuba policy. Since 1990, Torricelli, now a senator, has received more than \$120,000 in contributions from CANF's directors and trustees, as well as from the Free Cuba PAC.

Perhaps CANF's crowning achievement was the passage of the Helms-Burton Act last year. One beneficiary of Helms-Burton is the Bacardi Corp., which lost its rum distilleries in Cuba following the 1959 revolution. Because it wasn't a U.S. corporation, it could not file a U.S.-backed claim against Cuba. Under the new law, however, Bacardi can sue in U.S. courts competitors that use its old properties. "Squeeze Play" reports that Bacardi and CANF showed their gratitude to Sen. Jesse Helms by co-hosting a \$500-a-

plate dinner in April 1995 that raised an estimated \$75,000 for his re-election campaign.

Many of the United States' closest trading allies have reacted vehemently to Helms-Burton, and some have threatened to retaliate. Domestic business organizations—including the National Association of Manufacturers, which represents producers of 80 percent of U.S. manufactured goods—have also denounced the law. This has put the Clinton administration between a rock and a hard place.

Eventually a rising tide of opposition to the embargo may overwhelm the anti-Castro lobby. In the meantime, CANF has reacted with indignation to the Center for Public Integrity's report: CANF President Francisco J. Hernandez says it is "a contract political hit on the Cuban-American community and their participation in the American political process."

—Michael O'Heaney

Russian Mounties

Russia's legendary horse warriors, the Cossacks, say they are prepared to independently impose law and order in war-torn Chechnya, and they demand that the government turn over the arms and authority they need to get on with the job.

"The situation in Chechnya is disastrous, and there is no protection for tens of thousands of Russians living there," says Alexander Dyomin, a leader of the Union of Cossack Hosts, a paramilitary group. "Either the government will provide us with the assistance we need to restore order, or there will be full-scale war. If they try to stop us, we will make war on the Russian government."

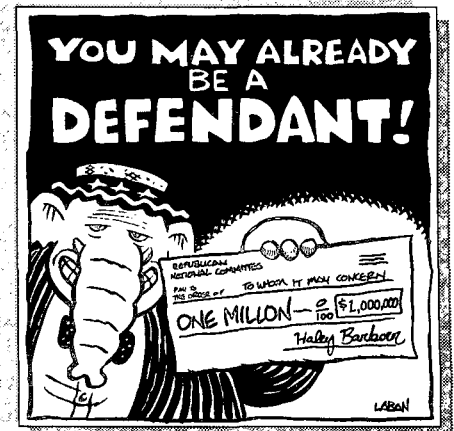
The RNC Clearinghouse Sweepstakes

"HEARD THE ONE ABOUT REPUBLICANS 'CUTTING' MEDICARE?" ASKED HALEY BARBOUR, FORMER CHAIR OF THE REPUBLICAN National Committee, in a 1995 ad run in newspapers around the country. "The fact is Republicans are increasing Medicare spending by more than half. I'm Haley Barbour, and I'm so sure of that fact I'm willing to give you this check for a million dollars if you can prove me wrong."

Eighty citizens took Barbour up on his challenge. The RNC, however, deemed their proffered proof inadequate. "Unfortunately, your response is incorrect," Barbour informed them in a letter.

Robert Shireman, a 35-year-old analyst at the Office of Management and Budget, is determined to collect the \$1 million. Shireman pointed out to Barbour that the net effect of the GOP's proposal, which became a focal point of the late-1995 federal budget showdown, would be to decrease Medicare spending. Shireman sued the RNC, and his case is now on its way to a jury trial in D.C. Superior Court.

In an attempt to derail these proceedings, Barbour issued a summons in January to 80 contestants, including Shireman, demanding that they consolidate their claims. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, contestant Frank Webster of Blackwell, Okla.—who has notified the Mississippi court he will not try to claim the prize—said, "It is ridiculous for a national party to solicit ideas from the general public and then turn around and sue them. I have to hire an attorney just to give them my response. ... Haley Barbour should be run plum out of the country." —Joel Bleifuss



The Cossacks of Russia's sensitive southern regions, who estimate their numbers at 9 million men—they don't count women—are descended from the famous elite troops of the Czarist empire who conquered new territories and then stayed to farm the land and guard the imperial frontier.

The USSR virtually eliminated the Cossacks as a separate social formation, but post-Soviet leaders have given lukewarm support to their demands for restoration of their Czarist-era privileges. These include the right to bear arms and organize autonomous Cossack military units, as well as self-rule on their traditional lands.

Russia's recent military debacle in Chechnya, which left Muslim rebels in control of the tiny Caucasian republic, has enraged the Cossacks. They see themselves as an elite Russian military caste, the traditional standard-bearers of Christian civilization on Russia's seething southern frontier, and they angrily reject the peace treaty that ended the two-year conflict.

"There are two districts in northern Chechnya inhabited by Russians. We will take these back," says Dyomin. "The Chechens understand only strength. Peace will only be preserved down there if they are countered by equal force."

One night in early January, unidentified attackers murdered 26 inhabitants of a Cossack community in northern Chechnya, just a few dozen miles from the spot where six Red Cross workers were slain in similar circumstances last December. The massacre prompted a high-level meeting of Cossack leaders, who issued an ultimatum demanding the Russian government either turn them loose to deal with the Chechen threat or get out of the way.

"We have weapons already, and we are prepared to fight," says Dyomin. "But the Russian government is persecuting Cossacks for violating the law against private weapons. They must change the laws and give Cossacks their rights, for the good of Russia."

The idea has attracted some political support in Moscow; one Kremlin official recently praised it. But Russian military leaders strongly oppose re-arming the Cossacks, and a recent attempt to pass the law fizzled in parliament. Liberals who voted against the measure argue that lawlessness in Russia's south is a problem for the state to solve, and that turning



political opponents of the Czar.

"The Cossacks are the fruit of Russia's imperial policies in the Czarist era, and in their aspirations, they remain basically an imperialist force," says Alla Gerber, president of the Russian Holocaust Center, a Jewish community project. "They are still anti-Semitic to the core, and their past violence against other peoples is well-remembered. Arming them again will terrify the whole population."

—Fred Weir

Labor's new health care option

Ask virtually anyone with a managed-care health plan, and they'll complain about diminishing quality of service; ask health care workers or administrators about managed care, and they'll complain about pressure to cut costs. Now unions in New York are doing something about this double bind. The state's AFL-CIO, which represents 2.3

There goes the neighborhood

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES IN COOK COUNTY, ILL., HAVE HALF AS MANY RETAIL establishments per capita as white communities—but more than twice as many liquor stores, according to "Liquorlining," a recent study by Chicago's Woodstock Institute. In the Chicago suburb of Robbins, for example, where 99 percent of the residents are black and the median income is \$16,985, liquor stores comprise 13 percent of all retail businesses.

According to the report: "Community development groups report that it is extremely difficult to interest developers or to secure city funding for areas contaminated by 'alcohol blight' ... Once liquor stores replace other commercial establishments, the business community, as well as residents, no longer enjoy the benefits of a healthy retail economy including regular government services and local Chamber of Commerce activities supporting the area."

The report goes on to say that liquorlining is exacerbated by the fact that "low-income communities often lack the political clout necessary to create or enforce laws reflecting their concerns, especially when it involves restricting private investment that generates sales taxes for a larger jurisdiction." —J.B.

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million union members, is the first to follow the recommendation of the national AFL-CIO Executive Council that unions pool their members' health care dollars to effect change within the health care market.

The New York federation resolved in December to "embark on a comprehensive program to utilize ... the collective purchasing power of union and union-related health care dollars on behalf of the members of its affiliated unions." The resolution called for the state federation's newly created Health Care Department to "pursue the effective use of union health care purchasing power to secure high-quality, reasonably priced health care for union members, their families, and the general public." This ultimately could mean making better deals with HMOs or insurance companies, or it could mean negotiating directly with health care providers. The department is now gathering information from individual unions to see what members want.

New York labor officials were spurred to action by changes in the way the state regulates hospital fees. Until December 31, 1996, New York was one of two states in the country that set rates at which insurers had to pay doctors and hospitals for certain procedures. Typically, hospitals could count on stable rates, with yearly increases to account for inflation. HMOs, however, were exempted by the regulatory system and were able to bargain for lower rates with providers. Last year, under pressure from the insurance industry, the New York legislature decided not to re-authorize the regulatory system, making it possible for all insurers to bargain with health care providers. One consequence, observers warn, will be a competitive free-for-all that puts pressure on hospitals to cut costs.

This has prompted unions to rethink their purchase of health care through insurance companies, HMOs and other middlemen. Not only do such companies rake off about 30 percent of total premiums in profits and so-called administrative expenses, including advertising and executive salaries, but the cost-cutting pressure they exert on hospitals directly threatens union health care jobs. By pooling their purchasing power—which the federation estimates to be \$10 billion annually—and negotiating directly with providers, unions can demand better quality standards and protection for union jobs.

A key collaborator with the state AFL-CIO in promoting this new approach is 1199, a New York-

based union that represents 117,000 health care workers. 1199 administers its own health care plan, which covers 300,000 individuals—with no copayments or deductibles—through an elaborate network of 10,000 physicians and dozens of hospitals. If it were an HMO, it would be the eighth largest in the state—and probably the most efficient, with administrative overhead accounting for a mere 6 percent of expenses. In cooperation with the state AFL-CIO, 1199 has offered its network and its administrative expertise to any union that wants to break out of the stranglehold of for-profit insurance companies and health care providers.

—Greg Tarpinian

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THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



T H E F I R S T S T O N E

TAKE A POWDER

By Joel Bleifuss

Women who frequently use talcum powder on their genital area significantly increase their risk of getting cancer. Yet despite clear evidence of an association between the mineral talc and ovarian cancer, both the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the cosmetic industry's main trade group refuse to acknowledge these findings and to regulate the use of talc.

A 1992 study published in the medical journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology* examined the history of talc use in 235 white women with ovarian cancer and 239 white women without the disease in the Boston metropolitan area. The research team, led by Bernard Harlow of Harvard Medical School's Obstetrics and Gynecology Epidemiology Center, found that women who regularly applied talc to their genital area increased their risk of contracting ovarian cancer threefold.

In the study, 49 percent of the women with ovarian cancer and 39 percent of those without the disease reported some level of genital exposure to talc. The researchers found that the "most frequent method of talc exposure was use as a dusting powder directly to the perineum." Further, they noted that "brand or generic 'baby powder' was used most frequently and was the category associated with a statistically

significant risk of ovarian cancer." Fourteen percent of the women with ovarian cancer in the study had applied talc to their perineum an estimated 10,000 or more times during the years when they were ovulating with an intact genital tract—compared to 7 percent of women without the disease.

The researchers warned that "given the poor prognosis for ovarian cancer, any potentially harmful exposures [to talc] should be avoided, particularly those with limited benefits. For this reason, we discourage the use of talc in genital hygiene, particularly as a daily habit."

The study concluded that about 10 percent of all ovarian cancer cases may be attributed to the frequent use of talc. Ovarian cancer, the incidence of which is on the rise, is the fourth deadliest cancer among women, killing about 14,000 American women each year.

Talc, a mineral related to asbestos, has been an object of scientific scrutiny for decades. As early as 1968, scientists examining cosmetic talcum products discovered that 22 of those they analyzed had, on average, a mineral fiber content of 19 percent. In 1971, researchers discovered talc particles deeply embedded in 75 percent of ovarian tumors studied.

Such evidence led the FDA in 1973 to draft a resolution that would have limited the amount of asbestos-like fibers in cosmetic-grade talc to less than 0.1 percent. But no ruling was ever made, and the cosmetics industry was left to police itself and rid baby powder and other talc products of asbestos-like fibers.

To their credit, cosmetic manufacturers appear to have reduced the volume of asbestos-like fibers found in the 77,000 metric tons of cosmetic-grade talc that the U.S. cosmetics industry uses each year—at least that's what the industry and FDA claim. But even without asbestos-like fibers, talc is a matter of concern.

In 1993, the National Toxicology Program conducted

Carcinogens in shampoos and lotions

The FDA is not doing enough to ensure that many foods and cosmetics are free of carcinogenic nitrosamines, according to William Lijinsky, the former director of the Chemical Carcinogenesis Program at the National Cancer Institute's Frederick Cancer Research and Development Center. The fewer tests that are done, the fewer problems there will be to find. "It is very logical," he explains. "If you don't look, you don't find."

FDA cosmetics researcher Donald Havery describes Lijinsky, who is now retired, as the scientist who has "done more work than anybody for testing nitrosamines for carcinogenicity." Nitrosamines are potent carcinogens that have been frequently found to contaminate shampoos and lotions (see "The First Stone," February 17).

Lijinsky says he was particularly concerned to hear FDA

Commissioner David Kessler, in a November 1995 radio interview, dismiss "as myth from long ago" the role of nitrites—precursors to nitrosamines—in promoting human cancer. Lijinsky says Kessler failed to realize "that the nitrosamines are the most potent carcinogens we know and active at extremely low concentrations in animals." In a letter he wrote to Kessler in response to the radio interview, Lijinsky pointed out that nitrosamines are so carcinogenic that they "give rise to tumors within the short lifespan of a rat." And, he added, "There is no doubt that such reactions occur in humans."

Lijinsky says the level of nitrites allowed in food should be further limited, and that the FDA should closely monitor and control the level of nitrosamines—or other nitrosamine precursors, such as DEA—in cosmetic ingredients. By itself, DEA is harmless, but when combined with nitrites, it forms the

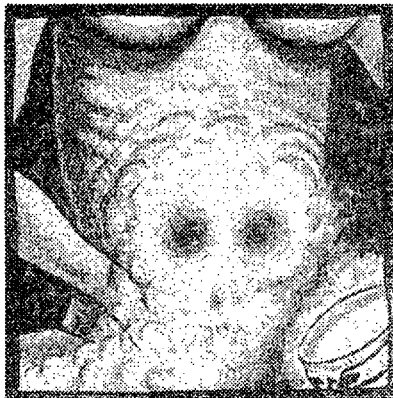
an animal study of "non-asbestiform talc" (talc which does not contain asbestos-like fibers) and concluded that when inhaled, it was carcinogenic to rats. The study was requested by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, which has been a more rigorous protector of public health than the FDA.

So is talc harmful?

It's important to remember that the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act regulates cosmetics differently from food, says Arthur Whitmore, the FDA's Cosmetic Technology Branch spokesman. In the case of cosmetics, he adds, "The burden of proof is on the FDA to prove that a product is harmful under condition of use." Don Havery, an FDA cosmetics researcher, puts it this way: "You don't see a lot of regulatory action because it is very difficult to prove harm."

But what is considered proof? According to the Cosmetic Toiletry and Fragrance Association, the trade group of the \$20-billion-a-year cosmetics industry, "no scientific study has ever demonstrated that talc causes ovarian cancer." The CTFA official position paper on talc maintains that "the latest toxicologic and epidemiologic studies conducted on talc" were reviewed at a 1994 workshop entitled "Talc: Consumer Uses and Health Perspectives," co-sponsored by the FDA and the International Society of Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology. According to the CTFA, workshop participants concluded that "when taken together, the results of these studies [linking talc use and ovarian cancer] are insufficient to demonstrate any real association."

That conclusion, however, contradicts the assessment of Bernard Harlow, whom workshop organizers had asked to review the latest epidemiological studies examining potential links between talc use and ovarian cancer. Harlow presented his review at the workshop and later published it in



the journal *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology*. The review's data show that four of eight studies since 1982 "implicated use of body powders" with increased ovarian cancer risks of 50 percent or more. He concludes that from an epidemiological point of view, it is "plausible" that any genital application of talc increases a woman's risk of ovarian cancer by as much as 80 percent.

"The studies that are out there suggest there is a risk," says Harlow. Asked whether his family uses talc products, he replies that they never used talc-based baby powder on their daughter. "My wife certainly doesn't use any talcum powder in her genital area," he says. "I certainly wouldn't recommend it."

So why does the CTFA cite the workshop to refute the link between talc and ovarian cancer? And why has the FDA not taken action, since ample evidence points to such a link? Despite repeated queries, the FDA failed to respond to this question by press time.

It's hard not to conclude that the FDA has no interest in finding proof. For their part, researchers know what other avenues need to be explored. Harlow ends his review of the talc-ovarian cancer

connection by saying "the greatest need is to confirm or deny the reports of talc embedded in human ovarian tissue and the report of easy transportation of particles through the female reproductive tract."

The Chicago-based Cancer Prevention Coalition has petitioned the FDA to require that all cosmetic talcum-powder products carry a warning such as: "Talcum powder causes cancer in laboratory animals. Frequent talc application in the female genital area increases the risk of ovarian cancer." The FDA could also follow the example of the European Union, which stipulates that talcum powder, like Johnson & Johnson baby powder, is not to be used in products for children under 3 years old.

potent carcinogen NDELA, which is the nitrosamine most commonly found in cosmetics.

In 1979, then FDA Commissioner Donald Kennedy threatened regulatory action if the cosmetics industry did not "take immediate measures to eliminate, to the extent possible, NDELA and any other N-nitrosamines from cosmetic products." Since then, the FDA has monitored the level of nitrosamines found in cosmetic products. But from 1985 to 1996, the FDA analyzed only 47 cosmetic products for NDELA, 23 of which were found to be contaminated with the nitrosamine. Havery says that his office has only one chemist and "he does work other than nitrosamines."

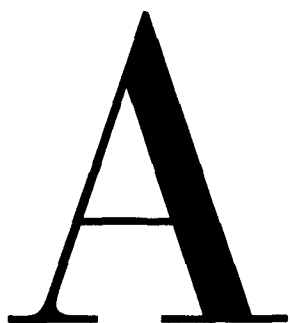
Lijinsky has some sympathy for the FDA's surveillance program. "NDELA, the principal nitrosamine in cosmetics, is absorbed through the skin particularly in an oily solution [like lotion], and it is quite a potent carcinogen," he says. "But one

of the problems is that it is difficult and expensive to measure, and there are thousands of products that have to be monitored, so I can understand why they don't do it."

One way to avoid the problem of monitoring all these cosmetic products would be to regulate the amount of DEA allowed in cosmetics. The European Union restricts DEA contamination to 1 percent of any cosmetic ingredient. DEA is currently found in much higher levels in products in the United States. According to Havery, an unpublished FDA study of 20 cosmetic raw ingredients found DEA in concentrations of up to 13 percent. However, only two of the FDA's samples exceeded the manufacturer's specifications—based on limits provided by the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association, an industry group. The CTFA advises its members that DEA levels should not exceed 5 percent of a final cosmetic product—significantly higher than the European level. —J.B.

H E A L T H C A R E

The Wal-Mart of hospitals



s the number of uninsured Americans grows, the health care industry is raking in record profits. That money flows into the pockets of a handful of corporate giants now asserting dominance over the field. Every three days, there is another hospital merger or acquisition—often of a nonprofit gobbled up by a for-profit. According to Public Citizen, 447 community hospitals were objects of mergers or acquisitions in 1995, and 58 nonprofit hospitals converted to for-profit status in that year alone.

The exigencies of managed care are driving the hospital-merger mania. Hospitals merge to increase size and market power, and thus cut costs, enhance their ability to negotiate with insurers and better compete with health maintenance organizations. According to *Modern Healthcare*, the amount of money hospitals spent on

care for the poor dropped in 1994 for the first time in more than a decade, even as profits jumped 17.3 percent to a record high of \$13.8 billion.

For-profits currently comprise 15 percent of the nation's hospitals, and a 1996 Coopers & Lybrand study estimates that for-profits will own one in four hospitals by the turn of the century. Columbia/HCA, the nation's largest for-profit hospital chain, is leading the charge. Columbia owns 10 percent of the nation's hospitals, including about one-third of Florida's hospitals and 80 percent of Utah's hospital beds. This \$20 billion giant owns a total of 350 hospitals and 133 outpatient surgery centers in 38 states. Columbia's game plan is to vertically integrate in order to provide "one-stop shopping"—owning everything from the hospital to the insurance company, the home health care provider and the local pharmacy.

The company says it brings private-sector efficiency to flabby nonprofits, cutting health care costs while improving patient care. A growing legion of opponents, however, sees things differently. They argue that Columbia and other for-profit hospital chains are buying up the country's health care infrastructure at far less than these institutions are worth, creating quasi-monopolies. They then slash basic services like trauma care—which too many uninsured patients use, making it unprofitable—and jack up the price of services across the board to boost profits. For-profit hospital executives and shareholders are making out like bandits. Columbia founder and Vice Chair Thomas Frist made it onto the 1996 *Forbes* list of the 400 richest Americans, amassing a net worth of \$1.1 billion. Meanwhile, consumers, the uninsured and the employers who pay for higher health care costs end up footing the bill.

Gobbling up nonprofit institutions like Pac-Man, Columbia has merged with or acquired more than 340 hospitals since 1987. In 1995 alone, the company negotiated 27 deals to purchase nearly three dozen nonprofit hospitals. The chain pays bargain-basement prices for community-built institutions that have been subsidized for decades by taxpayers. Unlike for-profits, which are owned by and accountable to their shareholders, nonprofits are usually owned by a university, religious institution or municipal government, and are incorporated as charitable trusts. The bylaws of these nonprofit hospitals usually empower the board of directors to sell the hospital, sometimes by a simple majority. In recent years, many have sold due to an increasing inability to compete in the managed-care marketplace.

Despite the nonprofits' community mission, institutionalized mechanisms rarely exist for community review of the sale decision. In nearly all cases, the only party with legal standing to intervene in a transfer or sale of charitable assets is the state attorney general. Furthermore, because the sales

***Columbia,
America's
largest hospital
chain,
gobbles up
nonprofits,
slashes basic
services and
raises prices.***

By Sean Cahill

of nonprofits to for-profits are usually inside deals, and because nonprofit hospital administrators and managers may benefit from higher salaries or shares in the for-profit institution, the sale price is often less than the fair market value of the hospital.

The Internal Revenue Service requires that proceeds from the sale of charitable assets stay "in the charitable stream," so usually the proceeds of any sale must be reinvested in another charitable entity, such as a free-care pool.

Golden parachutes are one way of diverting money from the charitable stream to board members' pockets. Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery sued last year to block Columbia's purchase of the nonprofit Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Ohio, in part because of the \$15 million in severance pay offered to three of the Blue Cross officials who approved the deal. "Fifteen million dollars in severance packages for three officials of an organization founded as a charity, and operated to help the sick and needy, strikes me as both inappropriate and excessive," she said. Montgomery is also trying to block the \$300 million

purchase of the insurer on the grounds that it would leave consumers with little choice and less power to negotiate costs; pose an insurmountable barrier for uninsured people seeking proper care; and increase the cost to business of providing health care to employees.

Columbia's incursion into San Diego's health care market offers an example of the perils of these sorts of deals. In November 1995, Columbia offered to pay \$195 million for half—and controlling—interest in Sharp HealthCare, an operator of four hospitals and a medical group in San Diego County. Last November, California Attorney General Dan Lungren launched a civil investigation into the proposed merger. Lungren threatened to sue to block the deal, charging that it "threatens the value of the charity and the charitable services provided to the community" and "would breach the trust under which Sharp operates."

Deputy Attorney General James Schwartz, who monitors nonprofit corporations for the state, charged that Columbia's offer "grossly undervalued" the facilities, pointing out

that two other for-profit hospital chains submitted significantly higher bids than Columbia. Schwartz vowed to sue "to hold the Sharp directors who voted to approve the transaction personally liable."

Columbia's goal is to turn a profit—at least 20 percent per hospital per year—regardless of the effects on patient care. The company's modus operandi is to buy up several hospitals in a city or region, close some down and consolidate services

in fewer locations in order to increase the capacity and the profitability of other hospitals they own in the area. For example, Columbia purchased Seminole Hospital and Women's Center and Pinellas Community Hospital near Tampa, Fla., on March 18, 1996. Three days later, Columbia closed the two hospitals, eliminating 318 jobs. Although the chain denied it had acquired the properties to close them and reduce competition, Columbia/HCA Tampa Bay Division President Bill Hussey admitted to the *St. Petersburg Times* that the company had done just that in the case of other acquisitions.

Since 1994, Columbia has closed approxi-

mately 20 hospitals nationwide, leaving rural communities even more isolated from medical care. In Gilmer, east Texas, Columbia closed the town's only hospital, leaving residents more than 20 miles from the nearest hospital. Columbia gave the city of Destin, Fla., only three days' notice when it closed Destin Hospital in May 1994. Columbia's Chief Operating Officer David Vandewater explained, "You just can't have a hospital on every corner," even though the nearest hospital is now 45 minutes away.

Columbia's relentless pursuit of profit has also led to massive layoffs. After acquiring Henrico Doctors' Hospital, in Richmond, Va., Columbia laid off 65 workers, mostly registered nurses, in early 1996, allegedly replacing them with part-time nurses, nurse technicians or other unlicensed professionals. Elsewhere, Columbia's layoff numbers are even higher: Columbia-HealthONE in Denver laid off 169 people in November 1995 and another 139 in March 1996; Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kan., laid off 204 in early 1996; and Good Samaritan Health System in San Jose, Calif., laid



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Friends in high places

Columbia/HCA has enormous political clout. The chain has more than a dozen registered lobbyists in Washington, who lobby Congress on Medicaid, Medicare and health care reform.

Republican Sen. Bill Frist of Tennessee, whose brother, Thomas, is Columbia's founder and vice chair, owns \$13.9 million in Columbia stock. Sen. Frist sits on several key committees, including Banking, Budget and Labor, where he has influence over legislation that affects Columbia. Last year, Sen. Frist worked behind the scenes to hold up a bill requiring a minimum 48-hour hospital stay for new mothers, even though he is listed as a co-sponsor of the bill.

Columbia's influence is even greater at the state and local level, where it has 86 lobbyists in 19 states. In Florida, Columbia's Good Government PAC was the state's largest PAC contributor in 1994, donating \$216,676 to Florida legislative races. After receiving \$116 million in state funds to relocate from Kentucky to Tennessee in 1995, Columbia managed to kill a bill requiring all Tennessee hospitals to report the amount of community benefits they provide. The Tennessee attorney general also quietly dropped his antitrust investigation into Columbia. — S.C.

off over 500 people in 1996.

Reports of labor abuses are widespread, too. These include charges of intimidation and coercion against hospital workers seeking to unionize, as well as threats of job loss and facility closure. After Columbia closed Palm Beach Regional Hospital in Florida in 1995, the nearest emergency room was at Columbia's JFK Medical Center. JFK Medical Director Dr. Michael Barfield was fired four days after complaining to Columbia that the overflow from the closed hospital, with ambulances lined up outside and an overworked staff, "endangers patients' lives." Last spring the National Labor Relations Board ruled that Columbia Audubon Regional Medical Center in Louisville, Ky., had defeated a labor drive among its registered nurses through an illegal campaign of intimidation, and ordered Columbia to bargain with the union representing the nurses.

These cutbacks affect patient care. In June 1996, the Indiana State Department of Health fined Columbia Women's Hospital of Indianapolis \$25,000 for failing to have enough nurses on duty. Columbia's Blake Medical Center in Bradenton, Fla., was fined a record \$55,000 in 1995 for denying emergency medical care to two patients. Columbia CEO and President Richard Scott asks, "Do we have an obligation to provide health care for everybody? Where do we draw the line? Is any fast-food restaurant obligated to feed everyone who shows up?" Co-founder Richard Rainwater evidently shares his partner's idea of what health care is all about: He proudly compares his company to McDonald's and Wal-Mart.

Clearly, health care advocates have good reason to fear that for-profits will eliminate medical services for the poor and reduce or eliminate other areas of health care that are not big money makers, like neonatal intensive care, AIDS care and burn and organ-transplant services. Two studies in Georgia and Tennessee conducted by the law firm of Parker, Hudson, Rainer and Dobbs in 1994 lend credence to suspicions that for-profits like Columbia are "cream-skimming" profitable patients, leaving nonprofits to handle indigent

care. The studies found that in both states, nonprofits provided a disproportionate amount of care for the poor, even as they charged paying patients less for services than did the investor-owned hospitals.

State health officials in Columbia's home state of Tennessee also found that nine of the company's hospitals there provided noticeably less care to the poor than nonprofits and even other for-profits. In North Carolina, the attorney general's office put a hospital sale on hold because Columbia would not agree to maintain emergency medical services and indigent and charity care "at the same level currently provided." The sale went through when, in a compromise, Columbia agreed to provide "sufficient" indigent care.

In regions of the country where Columbia and other for-profit hospital chains dominate the market, including Florida and El Paso, Texas, studies document price increases for hospital services. In Florida, Columbia has asked on 10 occasions for state health care budget increases, and has appealed the Florida Health Care Board's rejections four times. A 1994 study of Florida hospitals documented that for-profits charged 13.7 percent more than nonprofits.

Citizens and government officials are organizing in response to the concerns created by for-profit takeovers of nonprofit hospitals. Labor unions like the Service Employees International Union and doctors groups like Physicians for a National Health Plan are working to expose Columbia's abuses. In 1996, Nebraska became the first state in the country to require full public disclosure and state approval of for-profit purchases of nonprofit hospitals. Massachusetts and California are considering similar laws. In Massachusetts, where Columbia owns two hospitals and has bids in for two more, state Rep. Patricia Jehlen has introduced a bill that would block for-profit hospitals from buying any more facilities in the state. New York state law bans investor-owned for-profits from owning hospitals there.

"Health care should be about prevention and treatment of disease based upon need, not about profit and corporate greed," says Kathryn Mulvey, executive director of the Boston-based corporate watchdog group INFAC, which is investigating Columbia. "The two are fundamentally incompatible. Trends such as the for-profit takeover of health care are not inevitable, but only occur because we allow them to, and because corporate lobbyists and campaign contributions block sensible regulations which enjoy widespread public support." ◀

Sean Cahill is a freelance writer based in Boston.

LABOR

White coats with blue collars

*Squeezed by
HMOs, doctors
are starting to
form their own
unions.*

By Annette Fuentes

For 10 years, Dr. P. has practiced the kind of medicine he loves at a major medical center's outpatient clinic in New York City. Like his fellow physicians, he was drawn by the center's excellent reputation for urban health care. But his labor of love began to sour in 1995 when hospital administrators, worried about falling revenues, put the squeeze on doctors to increase their productivity. They hired efficiency experts who followed staff around with clipboards, timing patient visits like cars coming off an assembly line.

"They set a specific target for how many patients you should see per hour at four," says the doctor, who prefers to remain anonymous. "They went to an incentive program, cutting our salaries by 10 to 20 percent, which could be restored if you met the productivity levels."

Without physicians' in-

put, the bean counters started changing the roles of clinic employees to the detriment of quality care. Ancillary staff, including social workers, translators and medical-records personnel, was slashed. Medical assistants, who used to take blood pressure and weight, were required to draw blood, a job previously performed by lab technicians. By the spring of 1996, their backs to the wall, the clinic's physicians decided there was only one thing to do: organize a union. The United Salaried Physicians and Dentists, a 500-member union based in New York City, is working with them.

Dr. P. says it may take a couple of years for his core group of 20 doctors to reach a critical mass for unionizing, because many fear being fired or blacklisted. But these union activists see organizing as the only long-term solution to their problems.

They are certainly not alone. Union talk has caught fire among physicians across the nation, as they've seen their authority, professionalism and incomes diminish with the rise of managed-care health delivery and the economic competition it engenders. Health-maintenance organizations and insurance companies are intervening in the practice of medicine—both at hospitals and in private practices—in ways that doctors and patients alike think compromise quality health care.

For patients, legislative remedies—such as recent laws that ban HMOs from limiting hospital stays for maternity and mastectomy patients—offer at least a piecemeal response to HMOs' profit-driven excesses. For physicians, however, old-fashioned labor organizing may be the best way to safeguard jobs and, not incidentally, to defend quality health care—an issue likely to unite doctors and their patients.

"Doctors are being aced out of decision-making by non-medical people and are trying to deal with the conditions affecting them. Collective bargaining is still the best model," says John Ronches, executive director of the Committee of Interns and Residents, a 40-year-old New York union whose members work in public and private hospitals and other health facilities. With 10,000 members in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., Ohio, Florida and California, CIR is the largest union of employed physicians. In 1996, it grew by 50 percent, says Ronches. That figure includes 950 resident doctors in a Florida hospital who voted by a 4-to-1 margin to join CIR in the largest union vote ever by doctors.

Doctors' burgeoning interest in unions can be attributed in part to the way managed-care health delivery, by turning doctors into employees at an ever increasing rate, is radically reshaping the medical profession. According to a 1995 survey by the American Medical Association, a record 40 percent of the country's 720,000 physicians now work as salaried employees of hospitals, clinics, HMOs and group

practices.

At the same time, fewer and fewer doctors are in private practice. The number of self-employed physicians dropped from 58 percent in 1994 to 55 percent one year later. Perhaps most significantly, 83 percent of all doctors—self-employed or not—had contracts with managed-care companies in 1995, up from 77 percent in 1994 and 61 percent in 1990. Chafing under the restrictive policies of HMOs, even independent doctors feel more like wage laborers.

Doctors' average earnings have taken a dive in the process. A study published last year in the journal *Health Affairs* found that doctors' incomes fell 4 percent between 1993 and 1994—the first time they've dropped since 1982, when such statistics were first collected. Averaging \$187,000 in 1994, doctors' salaries are still among the country's highest. Yet the unstoppable trend to HMO employment means doctors can expect to see their average earnings continue their downward march. The AMA survey points out that self-employed physicians earn 50 percent more on average than employee doctors. Though hardly a plight comparable to that of sweatshop workers, the threat to doctors' incomes helps spark unionization.

However, for many union supporters, money is not the overriding issue. "Most doctors are working stiffs in a very regulated industry," says Barry Liebowitz, president of the Doctors Council, which represents 3,300 physicians and dentists employed at public and private New York hospitals and clinics. "The question is no longer one of diminishing earnings, but can they be free enough to practice medicine as they learned it? Can they retrieve their professionalism?"

Liebowitz's members constantly complain that managed-care companies keep monthly tabs on the prescriptions they write and the referrals to specialists they make. "It hampers your ability to offer sound medical treatment," Liebowitz says. For the 142 doctors at the Thomas-Davis Medical Centers in Tucson, Ariz., who took the first steps toward unionization last summer, the issues spanned financial and professional concerns. Doctors at TDMC saw their decision-making powers whittled away soon after selling their practice to a Sacramento, Calif.-based HMO called Foundation Health Plans in 1994. Last year, they learned the HMO planned to fire 17 physicians and 33 medical assistants and to reduce malpractice-insurance coverage from \$4 million per doctor to a \$10 million aggregate policy for all. Doctors

leaving the clinic would have to shell out \$40,000 for their own "tail" coverage: malpractice insurance to cover any future claims against work they performed during their employment at the clinic.

The TDMC doctors hooked up with Dr. Robert Osborne, a private-practice anesthesiologist from Tucson. Osborne began researching unions last spring as the only way to confront the growing clout of managed-care compa-



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nies. "Where is the balance in the system when HMOs and insurance companies have all the power?" asks Osborne, a self-described fiscal conservative and Republican who enjoys the irony of his being involved in labor organizing. "The issue in this health care arena is going to come down to profit vs. good health care."

Within weeks of meeting with TDMC doctors, Osborne had 90 authorization cards and filed for recognition with the National Labor Relations Board as a local of the Federation of Physicians and Dentists, or FPD, a Florida-based union founded eight years ago. At a hearing last fall in Phoenix, the HMO's attorneys argued that the physicians could not form a union because they were essentially managers and supervisors. But the doctors countered successfully that without the power to hire and fire, they were no more than employees. In

November, the NLRB issued a 28-page decision in their favor, and two months later doctors voted 93-32 to be represented by the FPD, which is an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The organizing drive hasn't stopped there. On February 13, TDMC employees—including licensed practical nurses, medical assistants, office workers and medical-records personnel—voted 225-177 for unionization. The last remaining group of unorganized workers, registered nurses, plans to file with the NLRB for an election in the next few months.

The union's victory in Tucson has riveted the attention of labor and medical professionals everywhere. Many see it as a blow to the unfettered power of managed-care companies. But there is at least one major hurdle to clear before doctors from Nome to Nashville start paying their union dues.

The Tucson doctors, like the Doctors Council and CIR members, are obviously and unambiguously employees. But the majority of doctors—the 55 percent who are self-employed—are forbidden territory for union organizers. Federal antitrust law prohibits such physicians, who are considered independent contractors, from engaging in collective bargaining to set fees. The Federal Trade Commission, which enforces antitrust law, has taken a hard-line approach to physicians' attempts to organize.

The Doctors Council was poised in 1993 to form a national union called the American Federation of Doctors, with 10,000 members in Massachusetts, Hawaii, Colorado, California and New York, when the FTC issued an antitrust warning against the Colorado branch. The other chapters disbanded soon after. Liebowitz, however, is optimistic that antitrust laws are beginning to loosen and will ultimately allow even independent doctors to organize. He points to the example of truck drivers who, although independent contractors, are organized by the Teamsters. For now, though, the Doctors Council has accepted the limits laid down by the FTC. "I'm not going to fight a war that hasn't come down yet," he says.

Some unions, though, see the vast potential in organizing hundreds of thousands of dissatisfied doctors as too promising to ignore. Antitrust laws or not, these unions are aggressively pursuing doctors. The FPD, based in Tallahassee, Fla., has made a splash in the national media with reports that it is expanding its membership among doctors with managed-care company contracts. Jack Seddon, FPD's executive director, claims 2,500 to 3,000 members, mostly in Florida. Only a few hundred, however, are doctors; others are service-sector employees. And while Seddon says the FPD has negotiated contracts with HMOs that protect doctors from gag orders (which prohibit doctors from disclosing HMO policies to patients) and deselection (canceling a doctor's contract), the organization can't negotiate wages. When it comes to private-practice doctors, the FPD is less a union than a pumped-up professional association that can advocate for members, offer contract advice and apply political pressure.

Like all organized labor, physicians unions encompass a

spectrum of politics and philosophies. Older, established organizations, such as CIR, its sister group United Salaried Physicians and Dentists, and the Doctors Council, represent doctors and doctors-in-training who are clearly employees. Those unions unabashedly embody the traditions and practice of trade unionism, with its clear definitions of labor and management and its willingness to use job actions as leverage.

Unions spawned in the current environment, especially among doctors who've been self-employed, aren't likely to be as militant. One example of the new breed is the First National Guild for Health Care Providers of the Lower Extremities, unveiled with much fanfare in October 1996 as the first national organization of doctors. Pennsylvania podiatrist John Mattiacci spearheaded the union to counter the clout of managed-care companies. But like the FPD, it cannot conduct collective bargaining for its independent members without violating antitrust law. At the press conference announcing its launch, Mattiacci made clear that his union would have no part in striking.

Strike policy offers a litmus test of sorts for doctors' unions. Any job action would seem at odds with doctors' sworn duty to care for the sick and with their own image as a privileged elite more at home on the golf course than the picket line. When Canadian doctors staged a one-day walkout in December, they left no doubts about where they stood. Their action sent shock waves through the U.S. medical establishment. The AMA, which has an adamant no-strike policy, called the walkout unacceptable. The FPD's Seddon says strikes have been declining in the last 20 years as a useful tool, and that "physicians are not going to place themselves in a position of denying care to patients." Osborne, flush with victory in Tucson, concurs: "We cannot ever strike. Strikes should be publicly disavowed. If you reach an impasse, you go to arbitration." Osborne insists that the government would intervene to proscribe strikes if physicians tried to use them.

The Doctors Council, by contrast, not only talks the talk, but was willing to walk the walk in 1991 when contract talks stalled between New York City's hospital agency and Doctors Council members at a Brooklyn public hospital. Their strike was the first by attending physicians in the country, sending 300 doctors to the picket lines. Doctors continued to provide emergency and intensive care, and after two days, the union won a salary increase and restoration of funds for orthopedic services. The hospital agency also agreed to create a committee of doctors and administrators to review patient care and fiscal issues.

Doctors Council head Barry Liebowitz thinks established medicine's distaste for job actions is an anachronism. "The AMA's policy of no strikes may have been fine before medicine underwent a revolution," he says, "but not now." ◀ Annette Fuentes is editor of *Crítica: A Journal of Puerto Rican Policy and Politics*, published by the New York-based Institute for Puerto Rican Policy. Her last article for *In These Times*, "Slaves of New York," appeared in the December 23, 1996, issue.

P O L I T I C S

Wayward Willie

W

*San Francisco
mayor and
media darling
Willie Brown
has let his
progressive
constituency
down.*

By Randy Shaw

When San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown took office in January 1996, hopes ran high among the city's progressives. Brown's national stature and media visibility gave him a platform for implementing an urban agenda that could be held up as an alternative to those of such big-city mayors as Rudolph Giuliani, Richard Riordan and Richard Daley. While some were uncomfortable with Brown's reputation for backroom deals, others saw Brown as a politician who knew how to get things done. For all his corporate fundraising and reputation for putting style before substance, Brown's leadership, political skills and faith in activist government sharply contrasted with the mushy centrism of Bill Clinton's New Democrats.

Brown's 30-year political career prior to becoming mayor should have planted some doubts. Elected to the California State

Assembly from San Francisco in 1964, Brown became renowned for his fancy clothes and sports cars—as well as his liberalism on social issues such as gay and lesbian rights. Brown financed his expensive tastes by serving as an attorney for San Francisco developers, often appearing before city political bodies on his non-Assembly time. In 1980, Brown became assembly speaker after beating out then Assembly member and current U.S. Rep. Howard Berman in a bitter leadership fight. During his record 14-year tenure as speaker, Brown raked in massive corporate and special-interest donations, particularly from the tobacco lobby. Brown's statewide focus from 1980 to 1994 distanced him from San Francisco's emerging battles over homelessness, rent control, neighborhood preservation and downtown development. When Brown did get involved, he invariably sided with development and real estate interests.

Brown's corporate connections would seem to make him an unlikely ally for progressives. His supporters, however, argued that Brown used his fundraising to win elections and maintain Democratic control of the state legislature during a period—from 1983 to the present—of Republican governors. They asserted that the state Democratic Party's increasing reliance on corporate funds was part of a national trend that could not be blamed on Brown, and that, furthermore, Brown had to pursue a moderate course in order to preserve the support of his Assembly colleagues. Despite the obstacles, Brown strongly supported education, affirmative action, labor unions, and lesbian and gay rights throughout his time as speaker.

As mayor, Brown has had the power and capacity to carry out a bold policy agenda. San Francisco's mayoralty has control over virtually all city departments, and a majority of the 11-member Board of Supervisors endorsed Brown's candidacy.

Brown hit the ground running. During his January 1996 inaugural address, he surprised the crowd by appointing Robert Demmons, an African-American firefighter, as his new fire chief. Demmons was the leading force in a decade-long legal battle challenging racial and gender discrimination in the overwhelmingly white male fire department. His appointment as chief was a stirring symbol of racial progress that brought tears of joy to the eyes of many in the inauguration crowd.

Brown then named the city's first Asian-American police chief and two African-American deputy chiefs in a sharp break with the past. Although endorsed by the Police Officers Association, Brown had vowed during his campaign to improve relations between the predominantly straight, white police force and the city's large minority and gay and lesbian populations. Brown's installation of a young, diverse leadership team was an essential step toward this goal.

During his first six months in office, even skeptics conceded that Brown was reviving people's faith in government as a positive agent for change. He quickly announced that he would end former Mayor Frank Jordan's controversial Matrix program, which dealt with homelessness by issuing criminal citations to thousands of poor people for blocking the sidewalk or falling asleep on a public bench. The new mayor preemptorily fired the heads of many problem-plagued city departments, including public transportation, planning, public works, social services and juvenile justice. When these department heads could not be fired without evidence of incompetence, Brown quickly authorized independent audits to support his action.

During that honeymoon period, the mayor also proved surprisingly accessible, readily granting requests for meetings from children's advocates, tenants, juvenile-justice reformers, homeless and housing groups, and other constituencies excluded by Brown's conservative predecessor. Brown's approach at these meetings disarmed even the most seasoned activists. They were used to politicians responding to their requests either by directly denying them or, to accomplish the same goal, by agreeing to "study the issue." Brown, by contrast, would agree to their demands, professing astonishment that such common-sense ideas had not already been implemented.

But these amiable relations soon began to sour. Operating as a one-man government, without granting senior staff the authority to implement or even monitor his legislative or policy commitments, Brown seemed to gradually lose interest in fulfilling a progressive agenda. Treated more like a movie star than a mayor by the media, Brown preferred to bask in the spotlight at flashy public events.

His policy-oriented campaign had deflated charges that he was all image and no substance; Brown's emerging lackluster record and media spectacles, however, renewed these doubts. Candidate Brown stressed that homelessness was primarily a housing problem and vowed to actively address the issue. Mayor Brown instituted no significant new homeless initiatives during his first year in office and cancelled a long-planned mayoral homeless summit designed to launch new measures. In September, the mayor announced that homelessness was "unsolvable" and said

he could offer no answers.

Making matters worse, Brown fell back on conservative approaches to homelessness. In November, he announced that he was travelling to New York City to learn more about Mayor Giuliani's homeless policies. The San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness pointed out that the visit

was not necessary, since Brown had already mastered Giuliani's strategy for criminalizing homelessness. After repeatedly denouncing Matrix during his campaign, Brown continued the underlying policy while claiming credit for terminating the program. According to the Coalition on Homelessness, 15,588 police citations were issued to homeless people in the first 11 months of Brown's term—1,750 more than under the Matrix program for all of 1995.

Brown's unwillingness to seriously tackle increasing homelessness in San Francisco has shored up his support in the business community, which is opposed to programs that might attract poor people to the city.

Brown's record on housing issues also leaves much to be desired. Rents on vacant apartments in San

Francisco are skyrocketing, and tenant groups have pushed to strengthen the city's rent-control ordinance in order to keep long-term residents in their affordable homes. During his campaign, Brown promised to enact eviction-protection legislation, and he reaffirmed that commitment throughout the year. Then, in late September, he suddenly cancelled the Board of Supervisors' consideration of the issue. On September 25, angry tenants held the first major public protest against the mayor, a raucous event that resulted in nine arrests.

In a profile in the October 21, 1996, issue of the *New Yorker*, Brown explained the facts of political life. He said that he had delayed the tenant-protection measure in order to serve the needs of his allies on the Board of Supervisors, two of whom faced voters in November and needed campaign donations from real estate interests. Brown coined a term for such weak-kneed officials, derisively calling them "pantywaist politicians." "You know how I stayed as speaker?" he asked. "Because I understood the smallness of them. And I lived with the smallness of them. I fed the



San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown

smallness of them." Brown explained that the care and feeding of pantywaist politicians was no simple matter: "This is not Dick Morris dealing with a \$200 hooker. These are long-term relationships. These are mistresses that you have to service."

On December 9, the eviction-protection legislation finally reached the Board of Supervisors. The *San Francisco Bay Guardian* described the vote as a key test of Brown's progressive credentials. Led by Brown's own appointees, the Supervisors killed the legislation. Ted Gullicksen of the San Francisco Tenants Union told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that Brown had "led tenants down the road to slaughter."

Brown again showed a troubling tendency to sidetrack measures opposed by major campaign funders in November, when his Police Commission considered disciplinary charges in the case of Aaron Williams, who died in June 1995 while in police custody. The Williams case had galvanized the city's African-American community and was widely seen as a test case for the Brown administration's handling of police-misconduct issues. Van Jones, executive director of Bay Area Policewatch, described Marc Andaya, the officer charged with killing Williams, as "San Francisco's Mark Fuhrman." Looming behind the specific charge was the department's longstanding failure to discipline rogue officers, a tradition linked to the intractableness of the politically powerful Police Officers Association on the issue.

Despite a huge public outcry and vigorous prosecution

by the city's Office of Civilian Complaints, Brown's appointees on the Police Commission split 2-2, and the officer was cleared. Given that Brown makes no secret of his control over the votes of his commissions, it was clear his loyalty to the powerful Police Officers Association that had endorsed him outweighed justice for Aaron Williams' family. "For Willie Brown's Police Commission to side with a known racist cop against the city's African-American community will stand as a lasting blemish on the Brown administration," said Jones.

The media's fascination with him gave Willie Brown the opportunity to spark a national conversation about the problems plaguing urban America. Along with the *New Yorker* profile, Brown made the cover of *Newsweek* and was featured in *Esquire* and other national magazines. But he has never used these forums to urge greater federal attention to the needs of America's cities. Instead, as illustrated by a *Newsweek* photo of Brown sweeping trash in an inner-city park, Brown has chosen to spread the myth that all America needs are hands-on mayors willing to travel around their city 16 hours a day making government work.

Progressives can hold Brown accountable for his promises only by publicly opposing his betrayals and mobilizing grass-roots support. However, as with Bill Clinton, community advocates—many of whom work for nonprofit organizations dependent on city funds—fear they will lose their

access to political power and patronage if they criticize the mayor. As a result, many activists and elected officials who denounced former Mayor Jordan's pro-business agenda, criminalization of homelessness and tolerance of police misconduct have remained silent while Brown pursues similar policies.

Left-leaning supervisor Tom Ammi-ano, whose campaign-finance reform measure was vetoed by Brown, praises Brown's style, intelligence and commitment to diversity. But he, like most progressive observers, is disappointed that a mayoralty that began with such promise has delivered so little. "The influence of big-money lobbyists has become so pervasive in San Francisco," he says, "that even public debate on progressive issues, such as rent control or public power, has been killed." If progressives can't succeed in San Francisco, it shows how hard it will be to achieve social and economic justice in America's other big cities. ◀

Randy Shaw is author of *The Activist's Handbook: A Primer for the 1990s and Beyond* (University of California Press). See his "Ask the Activist" column at www.igc.org/activist.

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L A C K A M E R I C A

Girl X and beyond

O

*After another
horrific attack,
African-
Americans are
getting serious
about
confronting
black-on-black
crime.*

By Salim Muwakkil

n January 9, Chicago police found a battered 9-year-old girl crumpled in a dark stairway at the infamous Cabrini-Green public housing project. The girl had been abducted, raped and poisoned; her skull smashed and gang symbols scrawled across her body, she was left for dead in a pool of blood. Astonishingly, the little victim's grim story passed through the media mill without much comment for more than two weeks, until *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Lee Bey wrote an impassioned piece denouncing the public's blasé attitude toward the horrid crime.

"The act has been treated almost like a footnote in the local news media," Bey wrote, bemoaning the silence of the city fathers and prominent media commentators, as well as usually vocal black activists and feminists. Bey contrasted the media's paltry coverage of the Cabrini-

Green victim to the weeks of near-obsessive attention accorded 6-year-old Colorado beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey. "The cynic in me," he concluded, "says this crime has not shaken up this city because it happened on the wrong side of the tracks, so to speak; that this act has been tagged 'Senseless Ghetto Crime' and dismissed."

Bey's column triggered an outpouring of concern for the injured girl, who has since been dubbed "Girl X." It also sparked a flurry of activity among community groups that generally have little contact with each other. Leaders of civil rights groups such as the Urban League and the NAACP are openly joining forces with the Nation of Islam, assorted black feminist groups and dozens of black business groups to present a unified expression of outrage and support. They have raised more than \$200,000 to help the young victim's recovery, and vowed to work together more intently to confront violent crime and related problems.

Beyond the rhetoric of unity, however, African-Americans differ widely about how best to tackle crime in their communities. Traditional, civil rights-oriented black leaders, for example, are generally reluctant to discuss it at all. Cautious of lending credence to racist stereotypes, they tend to downplay the crime problem; when they do address the issue, they are careful to point out that blacks' high crime rates are the legacy of racist oppression. Some, however, are overcoming that reluctance. In a 1994 speech, the Rev. Jesse Jackson violated a longstanding taboo of civil rights orthodoxy when he admitted his own fears of black-on-black crime. "There is nothing more painful to me," he said, "than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery—then look around and see somebody white and feel relieved."

NAACP Executive Director Kweisi Mfume expressed a similar sentiment in a recent speech when he rejected the notion that crime is merely an outgrowth of racist oppression. The rate of black-on-black crime is much higher today than in the past when oppression was legal and much harsher, Mfume argued. "What has changed is that now some people assume that you have to be more tolerant of criminals if they are black," he added. "I disagree with that. You go to these funerals and you see the grief. ... At some point, we have to say, if you commit a violent crime, you do have to pay a price."

Jackson and Mfume are echoing a sense of frustration felt throughout black America, where a disproportionate number of crime victims live. Just as Chicago blacks have rallied to condemn the savage attack on Girl X, blacks in Miami's Liberty City gathered to mourn the death of 5-year-old Rickia Issac, who was hit by a stray bullet last month as she walked home from a Martin Luther King Day

parade. In Atlanta, people are enraged at the murder of Darrell Woods, who was shot on January 21 while sitting with his two sons in his car. Blacks in most U.S. cities can easily cite similar incidents.

African-Americans have, of course, always suffered disproportionately from crime. As pioneering black scholars W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier and Charles Johnson showed, this disparity is attributable to racist institutions and the legacy of slavery. University of Arizona political scientist James Clarke wrote recently in *Society* magazine that the black homicide rate in Chicago in 1925 was 103 deaths per 100,000 persons, compared to 11 per 100,000 among whites—and this was during the period when Chicago was earning a reputation for organized white gangsterism. “In Cincinnati,” Clarke continued, “the black rate was 190 per 100,000; in East St. Louis it was 229; in Miami it was a staggering 276. ... In New York ... black homicide rates were 12 times the white rates.”

Clarke concluded that the “roots of black-on-black violence can be traced back to the previous century, the Southern experience and the system of criminal justice that took the place of slavery as a means of social control after emancipation.” He argued that African-Americans’ social attitudes about crime were initially shaped by the sort of criminal justice system that confronted them after emancipation. “Southern prosecutors and defense attorneys alike trivialized black-on-black crime, suggesting, as one did in court, that a criminal case only involved ‘these niggers.’ Thus the term ‘Negro law’ emerged after emancipation to describe such judicial indifference and the existence of a different standard of justice.”

As historian Rayford Logan pointed out, the popular press generally reinforced these attitudes, portraying blacks as crime-prone sexual predators. Fear of the black criminal was a common pretext for the Jim Crow laws that prevailed until the civil rights challenges of the '50s.

Faced with this history of negative propaganda, it's not surprising that black leaders are wary of the subject. But the toll of crime has become so damaging, the waste so distressing, that black leaders are being forced to confront it candidly. The October 1995 Million Man March marked a perceptible turn in black America's attitude about self-reliance and responsibility, and many black anti-crime advocates evoke its theme of atonement. “It was the beginning of an independent political movement where people said ‘I don't care if you are right, left or center, we've got to do something,’” Professor Sonia Jarvis of George Washington University told the *Wall Street Journal* recently.

Some black community leaders even attribute recent decreases in the crime rate of Chicago and other cities to the march's influence. “Every day we're reading about another large city reporting a decrease in crime and murder, and nowhere is there any mention of the impact our efforts have had on that decrease,” complained Wallace “Gator” Bradley, the leader of a movement to bring about a truce

between Chicago gangs. “Instead of giving praise to politicians and police for the drop in the crime rate, the media should come to the grass roots to see what everyday people are doing to stop the killing and the violence in our own communities.”

It's easy to be cynical about these periodic effusions of concern about crime. Here in Chicago, I've seen them come and go. When 7-year-old Dantrell Davis was killed by a sniper's bullet at Cabrini-Green in 1992, the black community came together and vowed to change things. The crime even spawned the gang-truce movement, which advocates claim is still in effect. But within a few months, the fervor died down and it was back to business as usual. Another outpouring of good intentions followed the 1994 death of Robert “Yummy” Sandifer, an 11-year-old who murdered a 14-year-old girl and was himself executed “gangland style.” That, too, died out in due time.

But there is something decidedly different about these Girl X protesters. The community-building message of the Million Man March seems to have penetrated deeply into the community. Already, members of two church congregations, the Fernwood United Methodist Church and the Miracle Temple, have formed a security force of volunteers who will patrol varied high-crime areas. Bradley's group, United in Peace, has joined forces with WordSong, an organization created to combat sexual abuse. The two groups plan to sponsor a series of workshops for “street organizations” to raise their awareness of sexual abuse and educate them about its damaging consequences.

While these efforts at self-reliance are commendable and even necessary, they are not enough. The accumulated injuries of racist exclusion have crippled black America's potential and transformed many inner-city communities into criminal incubators. That problem can only be remedied by large infusions of capital for specific purposes. In June 1996, the Rand Corporation released a report comparing early-intervention strategies to the mandatory-sentencing laws currently popular throughout the country.

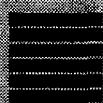
“Diverting Children from a Life of Crime: What Are the Costs and Benefits?” found that intensive intervention, such as home visits and day care, parent training, incentives for graduation from high school, and delinquent supervision, could significantly reduce the country's crime rate. Such remedies are expensive, Rand noted, but they're much more cost-effective than our current penal system. Rather than spend an average of \$12,000 to prevent a serious crime, we prefer to spend \$22,000 per year to incarcerate a criminal in a medium- or maximum-security prison.

The Rand report presents its case in the cold logic of cost-benefit analysis. It is wise to do so: In order for mainstream Americans to understand the need for resources in the black community, they have to be convinced that such an investment serves their interests as well. Until such an understanding dawns, African-Americans will have to devise their own methods to stem the destructive tide of crime. ◀

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FRANCE

Return of the Reds

*After a
20-year
decline,
the French
Communist
Party is
poised for a
comeback.*

By James Cohen
PARIS

It is neither the best nor the worst of times for the French Communist Party. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the crushing parliamentary defeat of the French left in 1993, and the rise of the far-right National Front, some observers gave the party little chance of recovery from its long decline. Yet it is staging a modest comeback—although at the price of a major face-lift and no small amount of internal trauma.

After a long postwar period in which the French Communists could count on a fifth or more of the vote, the party went into a tailspin in the mid-'70s and seemed headed for extinction. From a 21.6 percent showing in the 1973 legislative elections, the party fell precipitously to 7.8 percent in the European parliamentary elections of 1989. Communist presidential candidate Andre Lajoinie bombed out with 6.9 percent in the first round of bal-

loting in 1988. In the 1995 presidential election, Robert Hue's 8.6 percent score in the first round signaled a modest but perceptible rebound. The party now has 24 deputies in the 549-seat National Assembly, while the Socialists have 67 and the right-wing parties have more than 300. According to a poll conducted late last year, more than three out of 10 voters say that the Communist Party plays a "useful role" in French political life.

Various explanations have been advanced for the party's overall decline since the mid-'70s. Clearly, its traditional working-class base has eroded. The industrial suburbs where the Communists used to flourish have become much less socially homogeneous, forcing the Communists to become more of a catch-all party. To some extent, the party has been successful in finding support among urban service workers—in particular those in the public sector—as well as among highly trained engineers, technicians, scientists and teachers. The party continues to control several of its municipal bastions in the "red

belts" around Paris and Marseilles, but a number have fallen to the Socialists or even to the right.

More generally, hopes for social change through political struggle have faded in France over the past 20 years. As unemployment steadily rose during Socialist President Francois Mitterrand's 14 years in office, reaching 12 percent in his final year, most French people became convinced that the left could not make a major difference. The racist National Front has been the major beneficiary of this crisis of hope (see "Le Pen's pitchfork populism," October 28, 1996). Recent studies show that the National Front is now the most popular party among French working-class voters and unemployed people, with over 25 percent of the vote in both categories.

What, then, allows the Communists to be moderately optimistic today? One obvious reason is the recent change in leadership. George Marchais, the party's secretary general from 1972 to 1994, was almost a caricature of the rigid bureaucrat—the very symbol of his party's affiliation to the austere Eastern European model of socialism. His much more charismatic successor, Robert Hue, was an obscure figure nationally until he suddenly found himself in the leading role. Hue's only credentials were several terms as mayor of Montigny-les-Cormeilles, a small town outside of Paris, and the presidency of the association of Communist elected officials. This latter function placed him in a favorable position for the top spot, although Hue's only national claim to fame prior to 1994 was hardly a promising one for the left: As mayor of Montigny-les-Cormeilles in the early '80s, he led a loud street rally to the home of a Moroccan family suspected of drug dealing.

But contrary to most expectations, Hue has begun to breathe new life into his party. His personality has been an

asset; even conservatives find him an affable fellow. He is pleasing to TV audiences and apparently also to TV journalists, who frequently invite him to comment on the news. He is clearly a man of strong left-wing convictions, but unlike his dour predecessor, he knows how to get his points across with a smile. His roly-poly build and bushy beard give him an elf-like look, adding to his distinctive style.

More importantly, Hue represents a new generation of Communist leaders who want to save their creaky party machine by "modernizing" and adapting to France's mainstream political culture. Hue's main innovation has been to plunge his party into a deep and destabilizing process of internal change known as "*la mutation*," the metamorphosis, which is also the title of Hue's recent book.

While Hue's predecessors repudiated certain authoritarian features of the Soviet system as early as the mid-'70s, the top leadership still tended to dictate its ideas to the rest of the party. Under Hue, party members are encouraged to do what was practically unthinkable in the past: engage in open debate about what kind of program they should support. Veteran party members do not find it easy to respond to this call to join the debate. Many view this new freedom to discuss party strategy as a sign that the leadership is unable to provide direction.

One of the purposes of the party's 29th Congress, held last December, was to institutionalize the practice of debate. The congress, the first since 1994, brought together 1,170 delegates from all over the country. In preparation for the event, party militants spent weeks debating an official resolution, which included both broad declarations of principles and some elements of a platform. The document filled 15 pages of the party's tabloid-style daily paper, *L'Humanité*.

Militants were free to agree or disagree with the resolution, and for several weeks leading up to the congress, *L'Humanité* regularly printed a range of viewpoints, including those of two organized groups of opponents. Although these groups were not given the opportunity to present their own full-blown resolutions, they were able to modify the main text with dozens of amendments.

In a similar vein, the Hue leadership is forcing the Communists to shed their sectarian and inbred character by engaging in frequent dialogue with groups and individuals of different political persuasions. For the first time, the con-



Delegates vote at the Communist Party's 29th Congress in December.

gress invited as speakers several non-Communist intellectuals, including sociologist Emmanuel Todd and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. *L'Humanité* now regularly carries articles by authors who in earlier years would have been considered heretics.

The 29th Congress also recognized, for the first time, substantial autonomy for the party's affiliated labor unions. Beginning in the '20s, the General Confederation of Workers, or CGT, operated as a conveyor belt for party policy; top CGT officials held posts in the party's national bureau. If the party wanted to squelch a movement, such as the general strike of May 1968, it could rely on the CGT to do its bidding. But those days are long past. On the first day of the 29th Congress, CGT Secretary General Louis Viannet publicly resigned from the national bureau, symbolically cutting the umbilical cord.

The party's internal debate has covered the gamut of current issues. The question that now looms largest is whether the Communists can offer an alternative way to achieve European integration. They criticize the form that integration has taken thus far for reflecting the global trend toward laissez-faire economics. A key, related question is how the party can connect more effectively with emerging social movements, from public-sector workers to students, women, immigrants and the unemployed.

Three organized tendencies within the party have formulated strikingly different approaches to these questions. The first and clearly dominant approach, approved by more than 90 percent of the 29th Congress' delegates, is the one backed by the top party leadership. It favors keeping a program that

is distinct from the Socialists while still seizing every opportunity to join forces with them. Hue and his followers openly criticize the Socialists' free-market approach to European integration but do not exclude governing with them, which would mean compromising on this central issue. With the Maastricht Treaty already in effect and preparations for a single European currency—the “Euro”—and a European central bank well underway, the leadership figures that the Communists may have to adapt to this reality, whatever its implications for workers.

A second, opposition approach, which could be referred to as ultra-orthodox, is supported by those who feel that by compromising with the Socialists on Europe, the party is betraying its revolutionary heritage. The leader of this group is Rémy Auchédé, a rather obscure militant from the north of France. This group calls for a clear break with the capitalist system and criticizes the party's current language about “moving beyond” capitalism as too fuzzy. This tendency, which includes many who are clearly nostalgic for the old days of Stalinism, controls only one territorial federation out of 96, but may influence up to 15 percent of party members nationwide.

A third group, slightly more influential than the ultra-orthodox tendency because of its support among intellectuals, is known as the “Refondateurs”—the refounders. Three leading figures associated with this tendency are historian Roger Martelli; Jack Ralite, who was France's minister of health from 1981 to 1984; and National Assembly represen-

tative Guy Hermier from Marseilles. They call for the party to form, in conjunction with other forces on the left, a “radical pole” that would serve as a dynamic counterweight to the Socialists. These other forces could include the Greens, the neo-Trotskyite Communist Revolutionary League and, above all, various emerging social movements. They advocate, for instance, supporting not only workers' struggles but also immigrant rights, unemployed-workers unions and student campaigns to defend the quality of higher education against government-imposed cuts. The point is to be present wherever “radicalness” manifests itself in struggle and to form a bloc that could theoretically claim 20 percent or more of the vote. The consolidation of such a bloc would presumably force the Socialists—who also have about 20 percent support—to move toward more radical positions.

The Refondateurs agree with the current leadership that the party should not return to its old habit of trying to control every movement in which it is involved. Unlike Hue and his followers, however, they recommend staying out of government coalitions as long as the Socialists continue to endorse a free-market European policy.

Hue is unlikely to heed this advice. The organization of the French elections in two rounds encourages a party like the Communists, after standing alone in the first round of balloting, to join forces with other parties on the left in the second round. In exchange for this support, the party can reasonably hope for participation in government, possibly to the tune of two or three ministerial positions. Hue has made it clear that he wants his party to become a “party of government” for the first time since 1984.

The prospect of a left government is not as remote as it might seem. Legislative elections are due to take place in 1998, and the governing right, under Prime Minister Alain Juppé, has steadily lost support because of its austerity policies and band-aid measures against unemployment. Although polls can be misleading, Juppé has barely topped 30 percent in recent months.

While the French Communist Party is more democratic than ever before, this is no guarantee of a decisive breakthrough in the foreseeable future. The sense of disarray felt by many militants is not due only to their lack of experience in open debate; they are also finding it difficult to determine exactly what their party stands for. There is an uneasy feeling on the part of many Communists, including Hue supporters, that their party may go the route of the Italian Communist Party. Early in the '90s, the Italian Communists abandoned their name to become the Party of the Democratic Left and sacrificed their radical orientation in exchange for parliamentary respectability—with little to show for it today. It is highly unlikely that the French Communists will change their name, but electoral expediency may indeed tempt them to jettison much of what remains of their radical identity.

James Cohen teaches political science at the University of Paris-VIII (Saint-Denis) and at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris.



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VIEWPOINT

Chasing Chile— right over the cliff

By Vicente Navarro

The threat to privatize Social Security is the culmination of 16 years of conservative attacks on U.S. government protections for working people. As part of a worldwide corporate agenda, the World Bank, among others, has promoted the privatization of public pension systems as a logical response to the increasing demands of aging populations in the United States and abroad. Both Republicans and conservative Democrats have strongly advocated privatization, and now the Clinton administration is indicating an openness to changes in Social Security that would move us in that direction.

In all these efforts, the Chilean experience with a privatized social-security program has been trotted out as an example of the benefits that such a change would provide. The proposals put forward by the Republican leadership in this country, for instance, come quite close to the Chilean model. And a recent World Bank report on aging, *Averting the Old Age Crisis: Policies to Protect the Old and Promote Growth*, suggests that Chile's experience is relevant to Western industrialized countries. But a closer examination of Chile's privatization experiment suggests that this is a course that other countries, whatever their level of development, would do well to avoid.

Until the overthrow of the Allende regime in 1973, Chile had one of the most advanced social-security systems in Latin America. Established in 1920, the system had expanded by 1973 to cover 75 percent of the Chilean labor force, as well as all public servants and members of the armed forces. Benefits were funded by employers' and workers' contributions. They were based on the rate and duration of

contribution payments, but were tilted in favor of lower-paid workers, giving the system a redistributive effect. Three main trust funds administered the system: one for blue-collar workers, one for public functionaries and one for white-collar workers. Reserve pension funds were used for social purposes such as loans for low-income housing.

To be sure, the system was far from perfectly egalitarian. Public functionaries' pensions were equal to their full salaries at the time of retirement, whereas blue-collar workers received only a fraction of theirs. Employees of large companies—in general, those with more than 100 employees—and armed-forces personnel not only received pensions equal to their full salaries, but also to the annual increases they would have enjoyed if still working. Deficits in these latter funds were

paid out of current revenues. An unknown but probably small proportion of the labor force—those casually or irregularly employed—was not covered at all. Despite these disparities, however, Chile's social-security system was relatively efficient and humane.

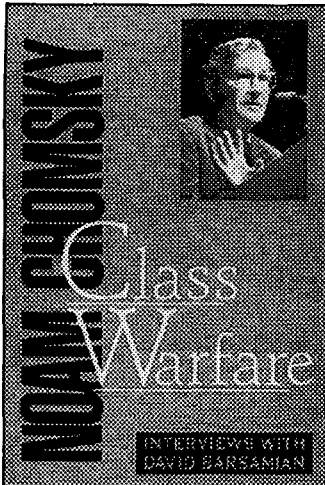
Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular government declared its intention to equalize benefits among workers and employees of different sectors, but shortly thereafter his regime was overthrown and the system was dismantled. Gen. Augusto Pinochet eliminated employer contributions and reduced pension payment levels by 26 percent from 1974 to 1980. Then, in 1980, acting on the advice of economic advisers from the University of Chicago—referred to in Chile as the “Chicago boys”—Pinochet privatized social security. Workers and employees who entered the labor market after 1982 were not allowed to participate in the old social-security system, but were

forced to contribute to private pension funds. Workers who were already part of the social-security system were offered government subsidies of 21 percent of their contributions to the private funds if they agreed to transfer. As a result, over 1 million of the 1.7 million workers paying into the public system had switched over to the private system by 1982.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle faced by social-security privatizers is that public systems are operated on a pay-as-you-go basis; that is, the contributions of today's workers pay for the benefits of today's retirees. If some contributions are now to go to private funds, then the government must make good the resulting shortfall in the public system. In Chile, this problem was exacerbated by the subsidy pro-

*Chile's privatized
social-security
system is not
the wild success
some would have us
believe.*

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vided to workers who switched from the public to the private system. Because of the precipitous drop in the number of workers contributing to the public system, the government spends 6.2 percent of GDP on retirement benefits. Privatization, then, has required an enormous increase in public funding, both to cover the growing deficits in the old funds and to subsidize contributors' premium payments to private funds.

On the other hand, the new private funds began collecting contributions immediately, but did not have to pay out benefits until covered workers retire 10, 20, 30 or more years down the road. Even today, only 22,000 pensioners receive payments from private insurers. Thus, even though the administrative expenses of the private funds are 33 percent of pension payments—compared to only 4 percent in the public social-security system—the former are rolling in money while the latter runs a huge and mounting deficit. The private pension funds are also flush because of their stringent eligibility requirements and insufficient benefits. Thirty-five percent of all workers do not meet the requirements for becoming a beneficiary—each private fund has its own set—and have no pension coverage at all. And even after 20 years in the plan, according to a study commissioned by the private-pension companies themselves, 34 percent of male contributors and 45 percent of female contributors will receive a minimum pension from private insurers equal to only 85 percent of the minimum wage. The government will then supplement payments enough to bring them up to minimum-wage levels—yet another major public expense.

At the other end of the scale, the top 20 percent of enrollees in private pensions will receive a higher level of benefits upon retirement than they would have under the public social-security system—which explains why the new system is popular among Chile's upper classes. But the plan's strongest supporters and main promoters abroad are the insurance companies and banks. In 1990, private pension funds managed \$5.75 billion in Chilean savings.

Because individuals control the investment of their own funds, the "Chicago boys" argue, Chile's privatization of social security is an experiment in democracy. But enrollees have about as much influence over the investment of their funds as the average citizen has over the use of his or her savings deposited in a bank. Insurance conglomerates are the true controllers of pension-fund investment. Many of them are U.S. companies. In fact, three non-Chilean financial groups control 65 percent of the capital in the private insurance funds. New Jersey-based Aetna, for example, controls 51 percent of Chile's second largest private pension fund, the Santa Maria. These insurance interests, in alliance with employers, wealthy individuals and the upper middle class, have created a system in which they win and the working and lower middle classes lose. This is what privatization of social security boils down to. ◀

Vicente Navarro is a professor of public policy at Johns Hopkins University and author of *The Politics of Health Policy* (Blackwell).

IN PRINT

What we learned in Vietnam

By Ron Ridenhour

I waited over a decade to make my trek to the wall. Like many Vietnam vets, I was both drawn to and afraid of the journey. As I stepped down the path that chill spring day almost five years ago, sorrow and pain consumed me. I began to weep. Not like a baby, but in quiet, racking, uncontrollable sobs.

I spent 1968 in Vietnam in all-volunteer, small-unit combat: four months as an aeroscout door-gunner, and the remainder in Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, as a point man and then as a team leader. These were generally conceded to be among the army's more dangerous undertakings. Despite my foolish, youthful pursuit of harm's way, however, I never saw one of my buddies die. Still, I could not stop crying.

Why, I wondered as I sniffled before all those names, so few of whom I knew, does standing here evoke such deep, awful sorrow?

Maybe it's silly, but I've come to think that those tears were about innocence, about who I used to think I would become. Vietnam changed all that, for me and a lot of people. My tears were for that first day in the Nam when I had to face the truth: The war was not what our leaders claimed. We were not fighting it in the way or for the purposes they told us we would be. Vietnam was a bloodbath, a wall-to-wall atrocity. My Lai proved it to most.

"What was happening there," My Lai veteran Harry Stanley once said, describing the village when he arrived and the massacre that followed, "is not what they said was happening there." The same must be said about the entire war. Hardly anything the U.S. government said about it proved to be true.

Almost every Vietnam combat veteran and an enormous number of those who never got closer to the fight than the evening news suffered through a similar epiphany sometime

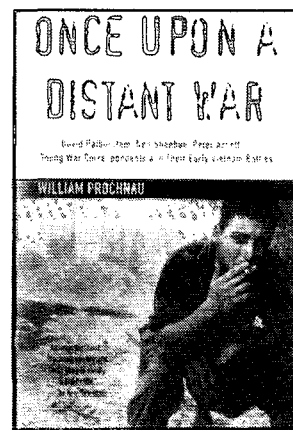
during the war. That part of Vietnam's legacy—the gap between the word and the experience—continues to reverberate through our culture in a way the young must find difficult to understand.

Three recent books, all focusing on parts of America's journey from Vietnam to the present, help bridge that gap. Collectively, they cover America's intervention in Vietnam, from our innocence during the first days of John F. Kennedy's presidency, to our sadder, deflowered present selves. Are we wiser? In some ways, yes. In some ways, no.

Veteran war correspondent William Prochnau's *Once Upon A Distant War* zeroes in on perhaps the most pervasive and damaging legacy of Vietnam: the low and relentless political art of public deceit. *Our War*, written by the era's most famous draft resister, David Harris, calls for a national reckoning with our conduct there, pouring out a dreadful roll call of the lies and crimes of the time. Fred Turner's *Echoes of Combat* takes America to the psychoanalytical couch, explaining how and why our society has failed to face that reckoning—and how we have fooled ourselves into thinking that we have.

I recommend them all. Ironically, Harris' and Turner's cases are both made most powerfully by that part of the legacy of Vietnam they do not address: the replication of the crimes of Vietnam in Central America. They are not alone. Most Americans are blind, deaf and dumb to *that* legacy of Vietnam and what we have become because of it.

How we obtain and filter the information that forms our world-view and how that information is manipulated in public discourse to empower some and disembowel others are themes that run through all three works. If nothing else, Vietnam taught us a great deal about the power of information and its manipulation. Political and military leaders learned those lessons far better than the rest of us. Men and women who daily ply the tricks of the liar's trade at public expense have become a fixture of the culture. "Everything became spin," Harris correctly observes. "Prevarication was soon endemic to the political process, as addicting as it was useful, and most of America's top shelf has been



Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles
By William Prochnau
Vintage
546 pp., \$15.00

Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory
By Fred Turner
Anchor Books
276 pp., \$23.95

Our War: What We Did in Vietnam and What It Did to Us
By David Harris
Basic Books
191 pp., \$21

strung out ever since.”

In *Once Upon a Distant War*, Prochnau describes the genesis of that dangerous, anti-democratic legacy. By concentrating on a crucial 30-month period in Saigon early in the war, Prochnau dissects not one, but two wars: America’s growing role in the shooting war in Vietnam and the U.S. government’s similarly expanding press war with the handful of American reporters in Saigon who were trying to report the facts as they saw them. In many ways, this is a good old-fashioned war story, one that is both true and telling.

Prochnau begins by detailing JFK’s march into the quagmire, covering it through the eyes and writings of reporters David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Charles Mohr, Malcolm Brown, Homer Bigart, Peter Arnett and Horst Faas, among others. Except for Bigart, who already had his, all made their professional bones in Vietnam between January 20, 1961—JFK’s inauguration—and the November 1, 1963, coup that toppled South Vietnam’s dictatorial president of nine years, Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem and his evil brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, master of the South Vietnamese secret police, were murdered the next day, barely three weeks before JFK’s own assassination. By then, the die was cast.

The government’s lies, as Prochnau skillfully documents, started from the beginning, before spin-doctoring had a name. On December 11, 1961, for instance, hundreds of people, including several reporters, watched the U.S. aircraft carrier *Core* loom into town on the Saigon River, loaded to its massive gills with helicopters and other materiel that the 1954 Geneva Peace Accords barred the United States from bringing in. U.S. Embassy officials simply pretended that the *Core* and its load of helicopters weren’t there, and succeeded for a while in persuading the correspondents to look the other way. The monstrous ship, so huge it dominated the flat countryside for miles around Saigon, did not exist either officially or in the pages of America’s newspapers.

As the buildup mounted and 1,500 American “advisers” began to arrive each month and get shot, the deceptions of the government mounted, as did the number of stories aimed at puncturing them. But back home, with few exceptions, editors and newspaper and television-station owners sided with the government for seven more years.

Like the shooting war, the press war raged from the first day to the last. Prochnau, however, ends his story with Diem’s assassination, noting that 5,000 more journalists followed Halberstam, Sheehan and Mohr to ably carry on their battles. In *Our War*, David Harris, who grew famous fighting the war and married Joan Baez, threads another, related story from where Prochnau leaves off. Beginning with his days as a wide-eyed high-school kid who watched JFK work the stump at the tiny Fresno, Calif., airport in 1962, Harris chronicles his evolution from Fresno High football player, class president and wannabe FBI agent to America’s best-known draft resister, federal jailbird and, finally, journalist. It is a path many will find familiar. In one way or another, most of us came from Fresno.

Harris recalls the war—the way we fought it and the way he fought it—with a brutal, minimalist precision, revisiting those times with older, wiser eyes and across the distance of two decades. Just the same, his uncompromising, sometimes lyrical recitations of America’s sins have the power to make the hair stand up on the back of your head and the knife twist in your soul.

Official lies and deceit are also major themes for Harris, as they must be for everyone who writes honestly about Vietnam. “The lying, of course, was standard operating procedure,” he writes. “There was a way things were supposed to be, which they never were, but everybody who had anything official to say said they were anyway, over and over again.”

He cites a series of critical propaganda gambits employed by Presidents Johnson and Nixon, from the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to Dean Rusk’s 1965 White Paper and Nixon’s efforts to suppress the Pentagon Papers. Each is a variation on the earlier JFK-sponsored propaganda campaigns detailed by Prochnau. As Harris makes clear, the art of the Big Lie, legitimized during the press war in Vietnam, not only took root, but has flourished in government ever since.

In *Echoes of Combat*, Fred Turner takes Vietnam’s Big Lie for granted: Everyone, he says, saw through it. Most Americans woke up following the Tet Offensive on January 31, 1968. Tet convinced them that the government was lying about Vietnam. The light at the end of the tunnel, people suddenly realized, was a Viet Cong patrol searching for an honest American politician.

Harris and Turner recite many of the same events as milestones in the awakening of the American consciousness: the Tet Offensive; Saigon Police General Loan’s stunning summary execution of an unnamed but unforgettable Viet Cong prisoner in the streets of Saigon; Ben Tre, the village a U.S. Army major said we had to destroy to save; the My Lai massacre, news of which ran the second moon landing off the front pages.

Of all the bad news, both writers agree, My Lai was the worst. Our boys in Vietnam were committing the very atrocities our leaders claimed we sent them there to prevent. No one wanted to know that.

But it was true. According to Turner, that profound dashing of our illusions of moral superiority was the crux of it all for vets and civilians alike. The Vietnam experience “capsized some of the most fundamental beliefs” of both groups “about themselves and their world.” My Lai is the emblem of their betrayal.

One third of the 1.5 million Americans who saw combat in Vietnam between 1961 and 1975 came home with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. If their dreadful deeds traumatized the trigger pullers, napalm droppers and village killers, Turner says, they traumatized the folks back home watching the war on network news, too. This is the fulcrum of Turner’s analysis.

Consequently, he argues, America and individual Americans slipped into a kind of personal, societal and cultural

schizophrenia, our psyches broken in two, one half fixed on the old, comforting, post-World War II myths we grew up with and wanted to believe in, the other fixed on the horrific, chaotic truth about ourselves brought home from Vietnam. Psychologically, we've all been trying to get back to the other side of innocence ever since, he concludes, each of us wishing, in the words of the country song, that we didn't know now what we didn't know then—and searching for a way to deal with the difference.

The good news, Turner says, is that the vast majority of us have healed and moved on. It may have taken smoke and mirrors, but we've done it.

First Turner analyzes vets' reactions to their experiences as psychological archetypes, arguing that these horrific traumas and their haunting implications engulfed society at large. Then, in his most interesting contributions, he turns to popular culture, tracing the war's transformation in the American psyche by tracking its evolution in the work of novelists, producers, film-makers and artists. In 1979, presidential candidates Carter and Reagan began to praise vets as heroes instead of baby-killers. And as the views of veterans themselves evolved, America turned a psychological corner.

Central to this evolving perception, Turner suggests, is our understanding of PTSD. We have moved from seeing vets as both victims and executioners to seeing them as victims only. That psychological shape-shifting allows civilians to likewise alter their memories of the wanton brutality of the war, providing them a rational framework within which to forgive our government and ourselves—and to begin to heal as a society.

This cure involves a good bit of self-deception and the voluntary averting of one's gaze—but that's okay, natural and necessary, Turner says. Our comforting revisions of reality in Vietnam are, psychologically, perfectly sound. "Loyalty to the hard facts is not the issue," he argues in conclusion. "To become a basis for individual or national action, our stories don't have to be entirely true—they just have to make sense."

Psychologically this may be true. Politically it is sophistry of the sort to which we have become accustomed. Turner may be right that people are still so frazzled by Vietnam that they can't bear to look the devil in the eye. The problem is, he thinks that's okay. Better a little ignorance and self-deception, he argues, than to "so fear repeating the mistakes" of Vietnam "that we may fail ... to defend our legitimate geopolitical and economic interests overseas. On the other hand, if we completely ignore the horror of the war, we may well re-enact it."

This is Turner's blind spot. We already have. Every picture David Harris paints of torture, murder and massacre in Vietnam and every story Prochnau tells of the government's campaign of deceit and manipulation against the press and the public evokes—with a few exceptions—Reagan's decade of

war in Central America. It's like some time-warped mirror-image of Vietnam. The biggest difference between one and the other, besides time and place, are the non-American faces of the trigger pullers in Central America. This time, American soldiers were kept at one remove from the blood-spatter line.

The press seldom probed the administrations' lies and denials and almost never broadcast the mayhem live at five.

Twenty years after the *Core* was made to disappear, as Reagan started revving up the counterinsurgency engines once again, the *New York Times* recalled and then fired reporter Raymond Bonner, essentially for being one of the first two reporters to expose El Mozote, a massacre in El Salvador which should evoke every bit as much shame among Americans as does My Lai. From El Mozote forward, information-management techniques born in the crucible of Vietnam, from little lies to big ones, worked in high gear on behalf of Reagan's Central American campaigns.

Like My Lai, El Mozote was dismissed first as a lie, then as an exaggeration, and finally as an unfortunate anomaly. In truth, as some of Reagan's finest well knew, it was simply the largest of many such atrocities. As with the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations, every time someone asked the Reagan-Bush team about one of these crimes, almost nothing they said turned out to be true.

Harris is right that we need a national reckoning with Vietnam, an American truth commission. But we need the same reckoning with Central America. The sins of the first, with some slight variations, are also sins of the second. Absolution requires the confession of all one's sins.

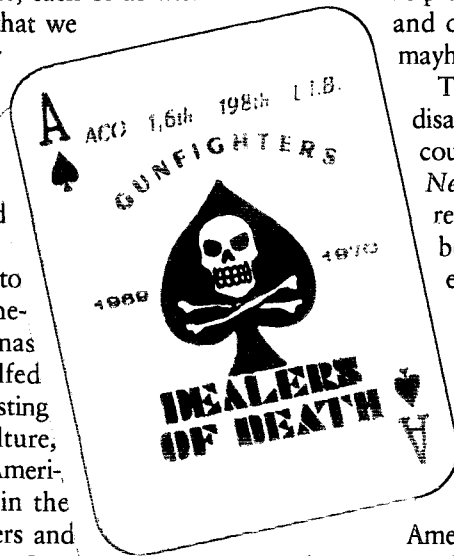
Neither Harris nor Turner has much to say about Central America, but both are convinced that the moral weight for the crimes of Vietnam fall on all our shoulders. "We are all truly in this together," Harris writes. "In short," Turner agrees, "we must acknowledge that, in part, Robert McNamara is our own creation."

I don't think so.

Sure, in a democracy we are all accountable. But if we are a democracy, then we also ought to be able to hold the people who run the government as accountable for their crimes as they hold us for ours. For Reagan, Bush and McNamara the charge is war crimes, which include murder. That we as a society cannot, will not and don't even *want* to hold them accountable for these crimes is, I think, the most damning legacy of Vietnam. We are in the hands of criminals and we know it, but we don't know what to do about it.

It's enough to make you cry. ◀

Ron Ridenhour is a freelance reporter in New Orleans and a Vietnam combat veteran. His letter of complaint to U.S. government officials initiated the investigation of the My Lai massacre.



I N T H E A R T S

Giving Vodou its due

“N

A long-awaited exhibition confers artistic recognition on the folk religion of Haiti.

By Joseph Houseal

o pins, no pins,” Marilyn Houlberg explained in her misty voice. To my eyes, the coarse cloth dolls seemed to beg for pins to be stuck in them. “We don’t stick pins in them,” said Houlberg, who is a professor of art history and anthropology at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and, with Donald Cosentino of UCLA, co-curator of “Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou” at Chicago’s Field Museum. She is also an initiated priestess of the Sante-ria religion, as well as of other Afro-Caribbean religions. It was as if she herself were a part of the exhibition. “Oh, and this doll over here is really special. It was buried near a grave and is a powerful medium for communicating to the other world.”

This bizarre and captivating exhibition, 10 years in the making, feels like the labor of love it is. Houl-

berg’s motive for working on this project was to bring true Vodou, with its festival aesthetic, to communities of the Haitian diaspora. The exhibition has traveled from UCLA to Miami, and is in Chicago at least through April 13 before heading on to Detroit and the East Coast.

“When displaced Haitians and refugees come to the exhibit, they cry,” explained Houlberg. “They dance. They place and throw offerings on the altars. They feel so proud. They are so grateful to taste again the rich experience they know so well.”

Vodou is the religion of Haiti, and the spiritual nexus for all the Haitian arts. Haiti’s troubled history has produced a complex interweaving of wildly disparate traditions: African tribal religions, French Catholicism, pre-Columbian indigenous practices, Freemasonry and other European mystic traditions, Protestant evangelizing, and 20th-century American culture. Vodou embraces them all by combining images from each in ritual artifacts and altars of mind-boggling density and diversity.

Vodou finds its sacredness not so much in the clinging to different religious expressions as in the claiming, re-arrangement and idiosyncratic empowerment of these expressions. The Haitian people were stripped through a succession of unspeakable injustices to an almost Job-like state of spiritual penury. What was sacred was their own selves and their dignity, in which, it seemed, they alone believed. As a religion, Vodou is bereft of authorship. It is neither a revealed religion, nor a sect of a larger religion (though some Haitian Vodou practitioners profess to be Catholics as well), nor a philosophical tradition.

Vodou is very much about identity—a self-claiming of status within the cosmos—and about power. The African slaves who became Haitian were ripped from their religious practices. Catholicism was forced upon them. Both traditions were highly iconic, and so worship of African deities was easily transferred onto Catholic saints. By contrast, North American slaves had Protestant owners, were not immersed in iconic religion, and instead of sculpture and installation-altars, created the songs of the black spiritual tradition. The songs of the U.S. slave heritage were quickly integrated into mainstream American culture, most triumphantly in the work of Gershwin. It has taken a much longer time for the rarefied world of avant-garde art to accommodate the explosive art of the West Indian slave heritage.

One enters the exhibition hall past a video monitor showing scenes of life in Haiti. A recording plays Haitian voices from an everyday life of which Vodou is an integral part. The first gallery contains paintings of Haiti’s history by contemporary artists. Nearly all the paintings seem to show maps or journeys. There is one particularly striking portrait of a Vodou female divinity, naked and painted with Vodou

symbols, hurling a snake. Another painting shows an ocean made up entirely of spirits, animal and human, and Haiti itself as a landscape whose only features are the U.S. invasions of 1919 and 1994. Still others depict bustling scenes of ships disgorging slaves and the conversion of the natives.

Both the object labels and the erudite essays in the exhibition's extraordinary catalogue shy away from Vodou's occult dimension, which revolves around ideas of psychic control, communication with the dead, sorcery, magic, curses and the return of the half-dead. The inability of an outsider to get the straight scoop on these imaginings is itself an act of empowerment for those who espouse Vodou. Within the safe confines of a museum, this mystique is alluring. For slave owners, dictators and invading soldiers, it was a source of great fear. Thus a people who had, time and again, been made powerless could use Vodou to leverage some share of power.

But if some aspects of Vodou are kept hidden from outsiders, it is also a uniquely accessible religion, drawing as it does from so many other traditions and cultures. Its syncretic character is evidence of a different sort of global integration, a spontaneous process that has roots in the fundamental human hunger for self-knowledge. It defies the contemporary presumption that multiculturalism is forced, superficial, and determined by commercial culture.

The foyer between the two galleries is occupied by an installation of mirrors, lights and panels that suggests a baptism or immersion. The second gallery contains a panoply of spirit bottles, sequined flags, altars, ritual instruments, relic repositories, dolls, paintings, images of saints, and every conceivable combination of these. The exhibition is a riot of cloth, stone, ink, sand, feathers, paint, bottles, wire, metal, sequin, wood and everyday objects.

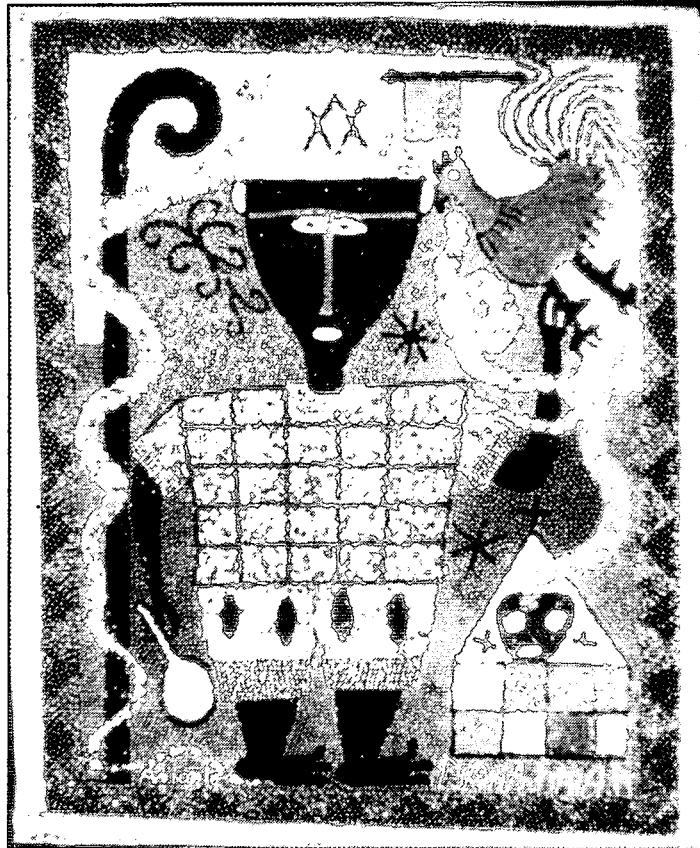
One altar is dedicated to Rada, the serpent divinity, and his consort Wédo, the rainbow spirit. Rada is represented by a chromolithograph of St. Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland. There is also an image of Moses, venerable, with the Ten Commandments. A sequined flag of intertwining snakes, a ritual dish showing Rada as a French Haitian soldier, African ritual diagrams and drawings, and dolls complete the altar. The dolls are "snake babies": Their heads are like children's dolls and their legless bodies are wrapped like

corpses with hair, metal ribbon, cloth and pearl. Nearby are a phallic scepter with a condom on it, a bar of Dove soap, a couple of dolls, a cloth flag and an altar with an icon of the Virgin Mary.

I asked Houlberg for an explanation. "This is over here,

and that's over there, and well ... you understand." Strangely, I did. This idea of making sense out of the madness in front of you, your own way, is characteristic of Haitian Vodou.

The last display is a replica of a Vodou temple. Several large monitors play actual scenes of spirit possession, trance dancing and ritual submersions. Rows and rows of paper flags flutter above. A colorful pole, up and down which run all kinds of gods, is there to pour libations upon. A painting by Edouard Duval-Carri just outside the temple replica depicts the Duvalier family, some as half-skeletons, inside one of the regime's torture chambers. They stand around Baby Doc



Antoine Oleyant's Danbala flag depicts Rada, the serpent deity, as a barefoot St. Patrick.

(Jean-Claude Duvalier) in a wedding dress. It is a carnivalesque reference to his mother's initiation as a Vodou priestess, and a jab at his much rumored homosexuality.

"When Chicago children see it, they think it's Dennis Rodman," Houlberg interjected. "It makes sense. All that initiation: scarring, tattoos, piercing, dyeing. And then he married himself. Very Vodou." The connection is not as far-fetched as it might seem. Rodman stands his ground much like Vodou: a defiant outsider, an ungraspable, self-authored power with no stable identity, in opposition to all set norms and established authority.

The painting is also an example of Vodou's changing nature, slowly shifting the balance between religion and art toward the latter. For the first time in Vodou, paintings are signed, and for the first time, this grand salute to mankind's spiritual self-preservation has found a home in a museum, where it can enlighten the world by becoming art. ◀

Joseph Houseal is a principal of Parnassus Productions, which produces documentary films and television programs.

SPEED READING

Never again?

By Paul Hockenos

The Tenth Circle of Hell

By Rezak Hukanovic

Translated by Colleen London and Midhar Ridjonovic

Basic Books

163 pp., \$20

Omarska was the most notorious of the concentration camps operated by the Bosnian Serbs. A northern mining town in the Kozara mountains, Omarska earned an infamous place in 20th-century European history in 1992, when television footage of its emaciated, rag-clad prisoners was beamed around the world. The pictures of shaven, ghostlike inmates—uncannily reminiscent of the Nazi death camps—documented the abominations being carried out in the name of “ethnic cleansing.”

The Tenth Circle of Hell is a harrowing firsthand account of the Omarska and Manjaca camps. Rezak Hukanovic, from the nearby city of Prijedor, spent over five months in the two camps and, unlike many fellow prisoners, escaped with his life.

Hukanovic tells his story in the third person, through the eyes of “Djemo.” Hukanovic—or Djemo—was smoking a cigarette in his cousin’s kitchen on May 13, 1992, when Bosnian Serb soldiers seized him and his 16-year-old son, hauling them off to the Omarska mining facility. Their crime, like that of Omarska’s other captives—doctors, judges, teachers, soccer coaches and journalists—was that they weren’t Serbs, but Muslims or Croats.

Hukanovic writes graphically of the wild, uncontrolled terror in the camp, and the beatings, torture and brutal murders carried out by the camp’s sneering, sadistic guards. Djemo and his cellmates were crammed into a sweltering, lice-infested garage and deprived of food and water for days at a time. One prisoner after another was led away to an interrogation room, more accurately described as a torture chamber. If they returned at all, it was barely conscious, with broken bones and bloodied beyond recognition.

Inevitably, Djemo’s turn came. After several guards beat him up, an old acquaintance entered the room. “Well, well,

my old pal Djemo,” he said. The narrative continues: “He kicked Djemo right in the face with his boot. Then he kicked him again in the chest, so badly that Djemo felt like his ribs had been shattered by the weight of the heavy combat boots. He barely managed to stay up on his arms and legs, to keep himself from falling. He knew that if he fell it would all be over. Ziga laughed like a maniac. Then he started hitting Djemo again with his weird club, even more fiercely than before.”

Those who resisted paid with their lives. At one point, a Muslim prisoner refuses to strip down for the daily abuse meted out by the drunken guards: “The two other guards backed off a little and trained their rifles on the nine naked prisoners, observing their every move. The guards with the knives started using them to tear away the man’s clothes. After only a few seconds, they stood up, their own clothes covered with blood. The air resounded with a long and painful wail. It sent shivers through all who heard it.”

Djemo looked on through the broken window in his cell: “Never in all his life was Djemo to see a more horrifying sight. The poor man stood up a little, or rather tried to stand up, still letting out excruciating screams. He was covered with blood. One guard took a water hose from a nearby hydrant and directed the strong jet at the poor prisoner. A mixture of blood and water flowed down his exhausted, gaunt, naked body as he bent down repeatedly, like a wounded cyclops, raising his arms above his head, then lowering them toward the jet of water to fend it off; his cries were those of someone driven to insanity by pain. And then Djemo, and everyone else, saw clearly what had happened: The guards had cut off the man’s sexual organs and half of his behind.”

The author tries to comprehend the guards’ motives. Some are local thugs or criminals. Others seem driven by revenge and personal jealousy. A former pupil, for example, uses his new-found position of power to settle scores with an old teacher. But in the end, even Hukanovic is at a loss to explain the orgy of hatred that seemed to him, as to most Bosnians, to come out of nowhere.

Hukanovic also tells of Serbs who resisted the “wild beasts,” refusing to participate in any way and even aiding their Muslim neighbors. Those few were themselves arrested and forced to work in the camp kitchen.

Under heavy international pressure, the Bosnian Serbs closed down Omarska in 1992. When Hukanovic was transferred to the Manjaca camp, conditions improved dramatically, not least through the intervention of the International Red Cross. Even though Hukanovic is understandably grateful for the blankets and medical supplies provided by the Red Cross, the black irony of such humanitarian assistance is hard to overlook: Victims of a genocide are held captive in death camps, and the Red Cross provides them with blankets and identity numbers. It seems the Red Cross, like the world, has not yet learned the lessons of Auschwitz. ◀

Paul Hockenos writes frequently for *In These Times* from Berlin.

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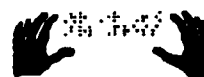
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Continued from page 40

We could talk in GEspeak—"rebalance," "reduction in force (RIF)"—or in our own vernacular: "out that door and on the street," "bumped to the unemployment line," "I was lookin' for a job when I came here, and I'm still lookin'." "Surplus" was the word we used in common—the word we looked for when the bump sheet got revised. By the late '80s, layoffs were announced well in advance (60 days were required by plant-closing notification laws under some circumstances), but there was always uncertainty about exactly how many people they would reach. The union would claim that eliminating this or that job would leave too few people to run the section. The company had to factor in retirements and quits. In 1989, before the company called off that year's layoffs, I watched myself go from 12 below the cut to seven and then two. When I made it over the line, a co-worker called me at home so I wouldn't have to wait for my 4 p.m. shift to hear the news.

The biggest question mark after a layoff was announced was how many high-seniority people would take early retirement. Some wanted it and couldn't get it, and some took it in a heartbeat. For many others, this was a hard decision. They were looking at living on a fixed income for many years. After all, 55 is not that old. Many people still had mortgages and some had kids or were helping to support grandkids. Some just didn't know what they would do with themselves if they weren't working. So they would agonize over the company offer. For those at the low end of the list, things were much simpler. One low-seniority friend of mine hovered over the shoulders of workers who had just received their offers saying, "I could live on that, can't you?" Another friend cocked her fingers like a pistol at older workers passing by.

In 1989 things got crazy. A woman working next to me went on sick leave for her nerves, and people flew off the handle all over the place. I quit speaking to a woman across the line because I couldn't handle her going on and on about every rumor she heard in the bathroom or the clock line. "They're going to lay off 200 more people. ... The Japanese are going to buy Building 2. ... GE's going to close the Park and move to Mexico."

Just when the rumors were wildest and the numbers projected to get laid off were rising precipitously, an employee at Standard Gravure in downtown Louisville took a couple of assault weapons and killed several of his co-workers and seriously wounded several others. I heard it on the way to work on second shift. We were all looking at each other saying, "It could happen here." The stewards and foremen were walking around saying the exact same thing: "Someone called New York (GE headquarters are in Connecticut, but if there is real power involved, it must come from New York), and they said the layoff will be small; if enough people take early retirement, maybe no one will get laid off." And that's how it went down. The company never admitted that Standard Gravure was a factor, but no one got laid off.

The bloodbath at Standard Gravure only bought us one

year: The company announced another layoff in 1990. On the same day, the employee newspaper laid out GE's strategy to dominate the global appliance market. That year we got angry, staged a little press conference, and won our 15 minutes of fame. But the layoff went ahead anyway.

That one didn't get me, but the next year's did. At that point, I moved back to Boston and eventually went to grad school. I was recalled shortly after moving back east. Since I didn't go back to GE, I was considered a "voluntary termination" and lost unemployment benefits. My cohort went back to GE and has worked pretty steadily since, from what I've heard. Of course, there was the 1993 threat to outsource all washer production, which might make the rest of the Park less than "viable." During a high-profile, we're-all-in-this-together campaign to "Save the Park," the company demanded—and got—concessions from the union and tax breaks from state and local government. Then there was the 1996 threat to outsource the entire warehouse. The guys in the warehouse—I never knew of any women there in union jobs—would bump people with less time, but that meant going back to the factory. Warehouse jobs are gravy jobs. The prospect of losing them finally put the union on the march, threatening to strike and talking about "corporate greed."

Insecurity may not be as intense now as it was when we checked bump sheets with obsessive regularity, but with the downsizing wave of the last few years, more people know what it's like. The experience makes a pretty deep imprint. You don't forget cooking on a charcoal grill on the porch in winter after the gas is shut off, buying meat a half pound at a time because you don't have a refrigerator, sleeping in a culvert, losing a house, going on welfare or food stamps, or looking (and looking and looking) for a new job without a car or a phone or a skill. Try greeting a job interviewer with perfect poise when your life is in shambles, or dressing for success when your kids need shoes and the light bill is overdue. Try starting a new job, or a new life in another place, or going back to school. What do you do when GE snaps its fingers? You have two weeks, maybe, to decide. Most of us did go back, over and over again.

Saving Appliance Park won't achieve sustainable production and consumption, or equitable distribution of income and wealth, nor will it help much with the challenges of information technology or the potential for more flexible, meaningful work. But that's not what's foremost in the minds of workers at the Park. Workers with seniority want their 40-hour-with-a-bit-of-overtime paycheck and the chance to retire from the place before it shuts down. For those with less time, the more that retire the better, while each new hire is one more person between them and the next layoff. No one expects security. Einstein may have said that God doesn't play dice, but workers at Appliance Park know better. All anyone there hopes is that the next layoff "won't get me."

Laurie Dougherty is a member of the *Dollars and Sense* collective.



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Periodically Alan Greenspan, the chair of the Federal Reserve, testifies before Congress about the state of the U.S. economy. Appearing before a Senate committee recently, Greenspan said that even the Fed doesn't really understand why we have what he considers a low rate of unemployment along with a low rate of inflation. He suggested as one likely explanation that compensation has been held down because workers are insecure—so worried about keeping the job they've got that they won't quit to look for a better one or strike for higher wages. He called it "extraordinary" that in 1991, at the bottom of the last recession, 25 percent of respondents to a survey at large firms were afraid of losing their jobs, while in 1996, in the fourth year of an expansion, 46 percent were.

I don't know for sure why the percentage of people feeling

insecure almost doubled in the '90s. I do, however, know a lot about the 25 percent who learned to be insecure by 1991. It was in 1991 that I last got laid off from General Electric Appliance Park in Louisville, Ky. In March 1974, when I was first hired, Appliance Park was an icon of the mass production, mass consumption economy: six major production buildings each the size of a city block; a warehouse that would swallow the business district of many a small town; assorted outbuildings housing research and development; a foundry; a power plant; three yellow locomotives chugging around the back 40; and over 23,000 employees. In 1991, there were fewer than 10,000.

Because of the seniority system in the union contract, those of us who were hired in the '70s took the brunt of everything the global economy came up with in trying to put together a new regime. We were jetsam on the economy's tides, clumping like seaweed where GE reopened a line or put on another shift, tugged by theebb and flow of leading economic indicators. Demand for major appliances responds to energy shocks, interest rates and housing starts. That's the macroeconomic stuff. For micro, we had robots, outsourcing and re-engineering. The company incessantly fed us information about the economy, market share and whatever Westinghouse and Whirlpool were up to that might give them a competitive edge.

By Laurie Dougherty

In the '70s and early '80s, layoffs happened abruptly, and we were the last to know. More than once, we found out about a layoff by reading about it in the morning paper, or watching the news on TV. In 1984, I was on sick leave when my ex called to tell me a GE layoff was in that day's paper. In the late '80s, the company got polite and told us about a layoff before they told the press. By this time, my cohort had become connoisseurs of insecurity—its intensities, modalities and coping mechanisms. If somebody's cousin passed the word that the warehouse was getting full, we knew that meant that housing starts or market share were down. People who had never heard of John Maynard Keynes knew that if auto sales went into a slump, demand for everything else would go all to hell.

Just as I started at GE, the post-World War II economic boom was going bust. I was laid off indefinitely—with no knowledge of when or if I'd be recalled—several times:

October 1974 to April 1977 (surging oil prices slowed the economy); two months in mid-1980 (I don't remember why); February 1982 to January 1984 (the major recession triggered by Paul Volcker, Greenspan's predecessor in the struggle against inflation); October 1984 to 1988 (GE decided to make its new compressor at a non-union plant); and August 1991 (GE restructured production of kitchen ranges). Between 1979 and 1990, Appliance Park did not hire one new person in production.

Continued on page 39